A LOST BATTLE

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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A LOST BATTLE

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CHAPTER I.

PAYING A DEBT.

"Is he not able to discharge the money?"
"Yes, here I tender it for him in the court."
MERCHANT OF VENICE.

WILL had no longer to complain of want of interest and occupation at Mallam, and nobody put any obstacles in his way. Mr. Perrott, though he talked a little about "amiable but mistaken philanthropy," entered serenely into all the arrangements for transferring the Long Croft from Sir Thomas Kenneth to Will.

Mr. Lennard showed no interest in the affair, and this was Will's only disappointment. He found that if he began talking about the new houses, his uncle answered drily, and soon turned the conversation. Neither would he give any opinion about the builder's plans and estimates; and he was very angry one day when the builder himself drove up to the house to see Will, and was shown by foolish old Jacob into the library. After this Will found it would be better to do all his business on the spot, so he made Archer's house his head-quarters, and went over nearly every day to watch the levelling, and draining, and digging foundations, which began at once in most serious earnest.

It was now the middle of September, and he was bent on having his roofs on before winter. Fortunately

the builder had not much to do, and so turned on his full force of men. They worked as they certainly would not have worked for Mr. Lennard himself. The quarry-people had spread Will's fame, for he was at the height of popularity with them. They made an afternoon lounge of the Long Croft, watching the progress of their new houses, and one sunny evening Will, walking in among them as usual, was very much surprised at being received with a cheer. The boys jumped on the mounds of earth, waved their caps and shouted, joining in with the gruff voices of the men. The workmen threw down their tools and cheered, and Archer stood in the midst, flourishing his hat in his left hand, and calling out, "Long live Mr. Thorpe! Good luck to him! One cheer more, lads." Will took off his hat and thanked them. The surprise and pleasure of this welcome brought such an odd feeling into his throat that he could not have said many words.

Next to those who were immediately interested, the people who sympathised most with Will were Sir Thomas Kenneth and his daughter. They were almost as often to be seen on the Long Croft as Will himself, and he was naturally very grateful for their friendliness, and asked Sir Thomas's advice about a great many things. These cottages were to be as convenient and comfortable as cottages could be, and ornamental too. They were to have little gardens and yards and wash-houses, the perfection of pumps, cooking-stoves with large ovens. They were to be healthy and cheerful and pleasant, as great a contrast to Lennard's Lane as could possibly be. But all this would cost money, and Sir Thomas remarked once or twice to his daugh-

ter, that Thorpe might find himself in an awkward fix after all, if that whimsical uncle of his should by any chance be turned against him. "But I can't go against my principles, you see," said Sir Thomas, "and advise him to run things up cheaply and badly. I consider that sort of thing morally wrong and degrading."

"So much the better for the quarrymen," said Julia.

There was another person who all this time was watching Will's course from a distance, with a good deal of wonder and puzzlement. This was Russell Thorpe, sitting quietly in his rooms at St. Lucy's, and seeing the outside world rather dimly through his spectacles. Will often wrote to him, and told him all his plans and projects, but not being great as a letter-writer, he often only succeeded in bothering his uncle, and making him wonder what this building mania could be. The whole thing seemed unsatisfactory to Mr. Thorpe, who had not much room left for philanthropy in his learning-stuffed brain. Still it was better that Will should be interested in cottages than in nothing at all. So he thought till an immensely thick letter came from Will one day in September, enclosing the plans for his admiration, and saying that he must at once sell out £4000 to pay for the land and for the building. Uncle Russell sat down and wrote his nephew a long, kind, vexatious letter of remonstrance, which only tormented Will. He had of course gone too far to draw back, and would not have done so if he could. So the money was sold out: £600 was paid over to Sir Thomas for the field, and Mr. Thorpe, thinking the whole thing perfectly ridiculous, was much angrier than he had been when Will con-

fessed his attachment to Lisa Dalbiac. It was a wasted life, he thought, and he mourned over it, though nothing could really weaken his affection for Will.

But there were worse things to come. One day, very soon after the cottages were begun in earnest, Will had a shakily-written letter from Colonel Dalbiac. It began with the kindest inquiries after himself and his doings, and congratulations on his prospects, which had been due a long time, the colonel said.

"You are certainly the luckiest fellow in the world," he went on, "for with decent prudence you need never fear the want of money, which makes life such a misery to some of us. I daresay you have plenty of spare cash in hand at present. If I did not feel pretty well convinced of that, I should not inflict upon you the following story. It is not a long one. I am sorry to tell you that your acquaintance Perrott has behaved to me rather shabbily. When he was here in May he obliged me with a loan of £500, to be paid in three months. Now things have been going against me all the summer; I have lost money, and have been unfortunate in several ways. My affairs, however, are certain to look up again soon. Feeling sure of that, I asked him to renew the loan for another six months. This he has declined doing in a manner which would be almost insulting, if it was not mere ignorance. I candidly confess that I cannot pay the money at present, except by Lisa's parting with some of her mother's diamonds. Unless you can help me, my dear Will, I must ask her to do this, which would vex me extremely. She knows of this debt, not from me, for I never trouble her with money business, but from

young Perrott. She is very anxious that it should be paid, and I told her I thought I could manage it, but said not a word of applying to you, knowing that she would have scruples about such a step. I have none, for several reasons. The son of an old friend, a very dear friend himself, and a fortunate man in this world, is surely the right channel of help in difficulties. Therefore, if possible, will you pay Perrott his money and set Lisa and myself free from so disagreeable a creditor. I hope before many months are over to repay you the whole £700. I ask this the more willingly, as I feel quite sure of your attachment to your old friends. And there is another reason, which you must not mind my hinting at, that I hope we may some day be more closely connected. But no more of this at present. When shall we see you in Paris again?—Yours very faithfully,

"J. M. DALBIAC.

"P.S. — Perrott has my promissory-note for the money. Be good enough to burn it."

Will did not read this letter at breakfast with his uncle, but in the park afterwards, among dewy grass and falling leaves. It was a little startling. When he read it the second time, the most important part was those few words of the colonel's about being some day more closely connected. Had Lisa told him? If so, a sudden flash of glorious hopefulness seemed to light up the thin foreign letter with its faint ink and crooked characters. For if Lisa had told her father what had passed between them, she must surely think of it sometimes herself, and not unfavourably. Could

he act on the colonel's hint and go to Paris soon, now, next week? No: the faith in Lisa's firmness came to check his wild, eager impulse. She had told him to come back in a year, and more than that, before coming back she expected him to be at least on the way to distinguish himself. "Not much chance of that!" sighed Will. Then there was another idea, a horrid one. Perhaps Alfred Perrott had said something about him to the colonel. In that case, perhaps Lisa was vexed with him for mentioning her name here. She could not know how he was obliged to do it. At any rate that could be cleared up by asking Alfred. Then he must sell out another £500. He was glad to do it for the colonel, only just now it was a little inconvenient, and would be an extra shock to poor uncle Russell. But of course it must be done, and meanwhile the money could be paid at once out of the £3400 which was already lodged for building expenses in the bank at the nearest town.

Will went into the house, fetched his cheque-book, and walked off at once to the Priory. In the garden he was fortunate enough to meet Alfred, and to get one trouble off his mind at once.

"Wait a moment," he said, as Alfred was leading the way into the house. "I want to ask you a question. Did you say anything to Colonel Dalbiac about me and—Miss Dalbiac?"

"Not a word; it was no business of mine. Besides, I didn't know it was at a stage to be talked about."

"It is not; you were quite right. Thank you," said Will heartily.

Alfred looked at him rather queerly. He would

have liked to know the motive of the question, and it was not very long before he was satisfied. He took Will to his father's study, where Mr. Perrott was writing business letters.

"One instant," said he, bending over his table. "I shall be disengaged directly, Alfred. Ah, good morning, Mr. Thorpe."

Alfred lounged on the window-seat, and Will took one of the smart green leather chairs.

"Well," said Mr. Perrott, pushing away his letters, "what is the news this morning? How is the Squire? Can I do anything for you?"

"I called on business for a friend of mine," said Will, laying his cheque-book on the table, at which Mr. Perrott stared with a somewhat puzzled expression. "My uncle is all right. What was the sum you lent Colonel Dalbiac?"

Alfred in the window made an odd face. Mr. Perrott looked very grave.

"Five hundred pounds."

"So I understand. Any interest?"

"No, no,—no interest. Excuse me—as a friend—what does this mean?"

"Only that the debt is going to be paid. A pen, please. Thank you;" and Will set to work to write his cheque. There was silence till he had finished it, and handed it across the table to Mr. Perrott.

"I think you have Colonel Dalbiac's promissory-note."

"You shall have it." Mr. Perrott made a solemn pause, gazed at the cheque and shook his head. "My dear sir, you are doing a very imprudent thing."

"Do you think so?" said Will.

"Now, just let me ask you—why do you suppose I declined to renew that loan to Colonel Dalbiac?"

"Perhaps you wanted the money."

"Wanted the money!" repeated Mr. Perrott with an air of derision, slightly waving his hand, as much as to say, "Look round this house. Does it suggest that the inhabitant is in want of five hundred pounds?"

"It seemed an unfriendly thing to do," he went on. "But I was actuated by principle."

"You had your reason, no doubt," said Will. "I really don't much care what it was."

"But you ought to care, and you must allow me to tell you. I happen to know that Colonel Dalbiac's affairs are in the worst state possible, and never likely to recover themselves. His daughter, no doubt, is ignorant of the extent to which he is involved, for Alfred tells me she has handsome jewellery, enough to pay off at least a good portion of his debts. Now is it charitable, is it honest, is it kind, to provide him with the means of going on as rashly as ever, while she remains blind to their condition, enjoying herself, one may say, poor young lady, on the edge of the precipice?"

"You are quite wise to get out of the connection," said Will quietly, unmoved by this burst of eloquence.

"Ah, you are young and sentimental," said Mr. Perrott, shaking his head. "This was exactly what your uncle feared, that Colonel Dalbiac would come to you for help, when he had exhausted other sources."

"What I do with my own money is no one's business but my own," said Will. "When I begin to beg of my uncle, he will have a right to complain."

Mr. Perrott still shook his head, and muttered something about "rash confidence." Then he said, looking straight at Will, "The young lady ought not to have permitted it. She ought to have sold her diamonds."

"In the first place," said Will, getting up, "she does not know that her father has written to me. In the second place, she shall never sell anything she values, as long as I am able to hinder it. Now I must be off. If you can't find that paper it will do another day."

"No, my dear sir, it won't do another day," said Mr. Perrott. "Never allow yourself to forget business habits. Here is the Colonel's note, and here is a receipt for your cheque. Good morning, good morning."

"That young fellow will make a mess of it, Alfred, before he has done," said the agent, when the front door had closed on Will.

"Paying the Colonel's debts. I should rather think he would."

"And this nonsensical building will never come to a good end. The Squire gives in to it, but he don't half like it. I ought to know him by this time. That young fool went home and told him about the men cheering him the other day. He mentioned it to me. 'The fact is, Perrott,' he said, 'we old landlords ought to be put out of the way. There is nothing left for us, not even a wholesome fear. These young men come and redress all the grievances, and make it quite plain that we are nothing but stumbling-blocks.' He said it all half laughing, in his way, but I know very well there was earnest under it. A man may take very

little interest in his tenants without quite liking to be superseded."

"Thorpe had better take care what he is doing," observed Alfred.

"Making such friends with the Kenneths, too. His uncle has said nothing to me about that, but I should doubt if he enjoyed it thoroughly. It would be hardly natural if he did."

"It would be queer," remarked Alfred, thoughtfully, "if Matthew Lennard was the lucky chap after all."

"That's not likely. Nothing less probable than that," said Mr. Perrott, but a faint flush came into his face at the bare idea, and Tiny wondered why her father talked to her so good-naturedly at dinner that day, pinched her cheek, and remarked that if girls were sold by weight she would not fetch much money.

CHAPTER II.

TINY'S NEW FRIEND.

"Thus goes everyone to the world but I, and I am sunburnt; I may sit in a corner, and cry, heigh ho! for a husband."

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

THE prophecies did not hurry to their fulfilment. The autumn days went quietly on, there were no early frosts, and the building advanced with wonderful quickness.

Matthew Lennard declined the Cambridge curacy and stayed at Mallam, so that Tiny still had the privilege of stealing glances at him from the great pew on Sundays, and of listening to his melancholy voice. Mr. Perrott talked sometimes of writing to the absent rector, and making a formal complaint of the dismalness and general uselessness of his curate's ministrations. But he never did it. Tiny had no more notes and no more stolen interviews. Though she meant to be very brave, and certainly showed no signs of giving in, her poor little cheeks grew thinner and paler, her eyes sadder, her voice lower and more plaintive. There was not even a Kean to sympathise with her now.

Between four and five o'clock on the last day of October, a foggy, dark afternoon, Julia Kenneth called at the Priory, and found nobody at home but Clementina. The others were gone to the neighbouring town, and were not expected back till near seven. Julia

came into the drawing-room and found a low yellow flame flickering on the smart furniture, and Tiny in a handsome winter gown trimmed with velvet, which made her look a hundred years old, sitting crouched in a window with her face close to the panes and a book in her lap. She started up rather nervously as the visitor came in. Julia looked rosy and spirited. She was dressed in rough cloth, and the fog had taken all the curl out of the feathers in her hat.

"All alone, Tiny, and putting your eyes out?" said she, in her commanding manner.

"It gets dark so early now," said Tiny apologetically. "The others are all out."

"So I hear. What have you got there?"

"Oh—only *Paradise Lost*."

"Dear me! Do you like it?"

"I suppose it is very beautiful. It is rather beyond me, but one ought to have read all those things."

"It is very far beyond me," said Julia. "But I never do try to improve my mind. I am not good and teachable like you, Tiny. Now do poke the fire, for if there is anything I detest, it is a half light like this. Or let me do it. You don't look as if you had strength to lift the poker."

Two or three tremendous thumps and digs roused a cheerful blaze. "That's right," said Julia, while Tiny stood helplessly looking on. Julia had used the splendid steel poker, and had taken no notice of the little black "curate" in the corner. What would the housemaid say? but it was too late now.

Julia took a low chair, pulled off her thick driving gloves, and began to warm her hands and feet. Tiny stood on the rug looking at her dreamily.

"Do sit down and look comfortable," said Julia. "What's the matter with you? Why do you look so horribly ill? Is it *Paradise Lost?*"

"Oh no, I'm quite well, thank you, Miss Kenneth," said Tiny, subsiding on the end of the sofa.

"And quite happy too, I suppose," said Julia. "I have just been talking to a friend of yours in the village, or I should have been here sooner. Don't blush. It was only your old servant Mary Kean. What a pleasant girl she is!"

"Oh yes. I'm very fond of her."

"And she is very fond of you. I wish I wanted a maid, but of course Adcock is an institution. A good one too—only it would be amusing to have somebody like Kean. She was talking to me just now about you. She said you were pining and wasting away, and fretting yourself to a shadow. Don't deny it, for I see with my own eyes that she spoke the truth. But tell me whose fault it is."

"Nobody's. Mine, I suppose," said Tiny, feeling very hot.

She had never shared much in her sister's admiration for Julia Kenneth, whose voice and manner and ways often frightened, and never attracted, her. Now she felt rebellious, and did not see why she should not fret if she pleased, without being interfered with.

"Very well. Then you are a little goose," said Julia good-naturedly. "I thought perhaps Lotty had been plaguing you, so I came here intending to scold her well. You know that peculiar aunt of mine. Well, for some reason she takes a great interest in you. I had a letter from her only this morning, asking after you quite anxiously."

"She is very kind," said Tiny.

"Oh, kind! She simply can't bear to see any one unhappy. Body or mind, it does not matter, she must try and do something for them. I was walking with her one bitter day in winter, years ago, when we came on a beggar woman who had fallen down fainting in the snow, with nothing but print rags on. She sent me for help, and stayed herself with the poor creature. When I came back I found that she had taken off her own warm cloak and covered the woman with it. There she was shivering. Of course she caught a dreadful cold, and had an attack of inflammation, from which she only just recovered."

"It was a lovely thing to do," said Tiny.

"Like an old saint, wasn't it?"

Julia had a certain rough tact of her own, which kept her off the subject of Tiny's special troubles. But as she sat rubbing her hands over the fire, and talking on half laughingly about her aunt's peculiarities, she watched the girl very keenly, and made up her mind that something must be done for her. Tiny had always been slight and delicate-looking, but now there was a transparency about her skin, a spot of bright fleeting colour on each thin little cheek, a dark line under her eyes. There was a slight cough, too, which startled Julia once or twice.

"I am going up to town to-morrow," said she, "to pay my aunt a visit. I have never been to stay with her since she began to take in the little destitutes. I thought I never would, but after all, she has rooms of her own, and one need not see anything of the creatures unless one likes, and I have a great deal of shopping to do, and papa won't leave the shooting and

Mr. Thorpe's cottages. So Adcock and I are going to set off together. Tiny, here's an idea. Would you like to go with me?"

"But Miss Kenneth would not want me," said Tiny.

"She would be delighted to see you. Don't I know my own aunt? I should be all the more welcome, for she and I have no particular sympathies. Do you like the idea? Would you enjoy it?"

"Oh yes, very much indeed. If it was not impossible"—sighed Tiny, her face brightening. "I think Miss Kenneth is quite charming."

"I never find anything impossible that I choose to do," said Julia. "Will Lotty be jealous?"

Tiny shook her head and smiled. She could not say no with any certainty.

"Never mind. She deserves it. I shall take you home with me to-night."

"Oh, but I can't—without anybody's leave!"

"Is there no one at home? Not even your father?"

"Alfred is not gone with them. He was out somewhere. Perhaps he will be in soon," said Tiny.

"I can settle it with him," said Julia.

Tiny stared, and wondered whether this strong-minded young woman was aware of Alfred's freely-expressed admiration. She herself began to understand it a little, and to guess dimly that there was something in Julia besides the off-hand fearless downrightness which made the surface of her character, always a repelling surface to Tiny.

The parlour-maid brought in the tea-tray and a lamp, and drew the curtains. The stiffly set out room began to look quite comfortable, with Julia making

herself at home on the hearthrug. She had taken off her hat, and the firelight glowed on her dark crop of curls, and flashed from the silver dog whistle hanging by her side.

Alfred, coming into the room with clean boots, and his hair nicely brushed—he had heard of Miss Kenneth's arrival as soon as he came in from his walk—hurried forward to shake hands with her in a state of exalted delight. It was seldom that he had the lady of his dreams so much to himself—for of course that mouse Tiny was next to nobody.

Julia, who was generally rather cross and contemptuous, was quite ready that evening to talk and laugh pleasantly. Alfred handed tea and cake, and stood leaning in a graceful attitude against the other corner of the chimneypiece, making himself as agreeable as he possibly could, poor young man. Tiny relapsed into the listening silence which was her most natural state, and wondered whether Miss Kenneth really liked Alfred. She herself had grown critical lately, and no longer thought her brother perfect. She had a suspicion that he talked too loud and too fast, and that there was an unpleasant twang in his voice, besides other possible imperfections.

"There is something I want to do, and I want you to help me," said Julia, looking at Alfred.

"Most happy, Miss Kenneth," said Alfred. "You have only to name it."

"I hear that Mr. and Mrs. Perrott won't be back till seven o'clock. So I want your authority to take Tiny home with me to dinner, and to take her to London with me to-morrow to see my aunt."

Alfred was surprised, and glanced sharply at

Tiny, but she was absorbed in the teapot. Julia's handsome mouth curled with amusement as she watched him.

"Well, am I to be disappointed?" said she.

"Certainly not, as far as I am concerned. And I am sure Tiny ought to be only too happy. What do you say, young woman?"

"I am very happy indeed, Alfred. But do you really think I can?"

"Why not, pray! Go and tell the maid to pack your things. I'll answer for the old birds," said Alfred, disrespectfully. "A change will do you good. You have been looking bad for some time."

Tiny advanced to Julia, who looked up at her with a gleam of mischief in her bright dark eyes.

"Oh—thank you very much, Miss Kenneth," said Tiny. "How soon would you like me to be ready?"

"Well, my dear—your very largest boxes had better be sent to the station in the morning. We are going by the twelve o'clock train. But I am not going to take even you and the little ones in that pony-cart of mine. Let me see—is your clock right? it is twenty minutes past five now. Mr. Perrott, will you kindly give an order for me? Will you send my groom back to Selbridge with the cart, and tell him that I want the brougham to fetch me at half-past six."

Alfred had stretched out his hand to the bell, but he drew it back. "I'll give the order myself," he said. "Servants always make mistakes," and he went out of the room.

"Now, Tiny, run along," said Julia. "Give your maid all the orders you can think of, and then leave the packing to fate. You had better dress for dinner

before we start, because we may be hurried at the other end. Make yourself as pretty as you can. Put something red in your hair, to brighten up that pale face."

"How good you are!" said Tiny wonderingly.

"Run away and don't talk nonsense," answered Julia, and Tiny obeyed. Alfred, coming back, was in happiness indeed. He sat down comfortably on the other side of the fire, and talked in a lively manner about horses and hunting, and a race-meeting at which they had met lately. It was not pleasant or necessary for him to remember that Sir Thomas had snubbed him rather decidedly on that occasion, and that Julia had only given him a friendly nod and two or three words, being quite occupied with Will Thorpe, who belonged to her party. But this evening there was no obstinate old father, no idle unconscious rival, to come between Alfred and the lady he admired. She sat in his drawing-room with her feet on the fender, as if she had lived there all her life, asked him for an ivory paper-knife to curl her feathers, laughed at his jokes, and seemed quite amiably inclined towards him and his family. Alfred began to think that perhaps—after all—it was not so impossible. The worst of it was that Julia never made the slightest approach to being sentimental, and a young man in love wants something of that kind to encourage him a little, and justify him to himself. Even when she spoke of Tiny's troubles and wretched looks, it was in the most matter-of-fact way. Alfred assured her, not without hesitation, that it was impossible for his father to consent to anything so hopelessly miserable as a marriage with Matthew Lennard.

"I suppose the right doctrine is that fathers know best," said Julia. "But if I was related to your sister Tiny, I know I should be very anxious about her. Do you see how thin she is? and have you noticed that cough? If I were you I would not let her stay here through the winter. You will have her seriously ill."

"I must think of what you say," said Alfred. "But when a girl has parents, one naturally supposes that they watch her and look after her."

"Oh, parents are blind. Or they have fixed ideas from which nothing will stir them. You should not give in to them. I never do."

"Don't you, Miss Kenneth?" said Alfred.

He would have liked to have known Julia's sentiments on a great many other subjects. I am afraid they interested him just then more than Tiny's health. But just then Tiny herself came softly into the room, the parlour-maid announced Miss Kenneth's carriage, and Julia got up at once and put her hat on.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand to Alfred, "you must give my kind regards to Mr. and Mrs. Perrott and Lotty, and make it straight with them for Tiny and me. If they want to wish her good-bye, they must come over in the morning. I don't know when I shall bring her back."

Tiny felt very strange, but rather happy, as she drove away with Julia through the village, past Matthew's lodgings which looked all dark and shut up, and on into the foggy lanes. Selbridge Court was all bright with fires and winter comfort; servants were waiting for them; Julia's dogs, great and small, came jumping round their mistress, and terrifying her timid guest.

"Don't be afraid of them," said Julia. "They are the gentlest creatures possible. Papa is dressing, I suppose. Come upstairs. Adcock, will you tell them to get the pink room ready. I have brought Miss Perrott back with me. She is going to town with me to-morrow."

"Yes, ma'am," said Mrs. Adcock, with the rustling black silk curtsey which always frightened Tiny a little. "Would Miss Perrott like to stay in your sitting-room, ma'am, while you dress?"

"Yes. What do you say, Tiny? Won't that be better than going to the drawing-room by yourself?"

Tiny was of course thankful, and sat down by the fire in a comfortable but rather untidy room, opening into Julia's large bedroom. There were books on the table, but she did not want to read; she sat and gazed thoughtfully into the fire, till the door between the rooms, which had been standing ajar, was suddenly shut, and she turned round to see Julia standing beside her, handsome and smiling, in blue and cream-colour.

"That is soon done," said Julia. "Now stand up, and let me look at you. Very pretty. You are to put this little shawl round you to go downstairs; our passages are horribly cold. Now I think I had better tell you, to avoid a shock. There are two gentlemen coming to dine here to-night."

Tiny opened her eyes, and Julia looked hard at her, with an expression of half repentant fun. "Don't be angry with me, Tiny," she said. "I know it was rather wicked. But if you are not vexed, I don't care at all about any one else."

"Vexed! oh, but how could you!" said Tiny. Her

eyes were shining with tears, but of her happiness and gratitude there could be no doubt.

"Now, goosey, don't look as if you cared so dreadfully," said Julia. "What an odd feeling it must be! The other is Mr. Thorpe. Papa only asked them today; we met at the Long Croft. I must tell you that I did not call at your house this evening with any plot in my head. If the whole family had been at home, most likely I should not have asked you at all. But the fates were favourable."

"What will they say when they hear?"

"Never mind. Your brother is responsible for keeping it all straight. Look here, Tiny. You are to enjoy yourself this evening. I won't have any fears and tremblings. If you don't smile and look jolly at once, I shall leave you here, locked up. Now, it is nearly dinner-time, so come along."

In the drawing-room Sir Thomas and Will Thorpe were standing on the rug, talking about the everlasting cottages. Matthew was leaning back in an arm-chair, staring at the ceiling, and not even taking the trouble to look interested. If it is pleasant to make a sensation on entering a room, Julia and her guest might have been satisfied. Sir Thomas stared incredulously, Will just checked an exclamation, bit his lip, and smiled. Matthew leaped out of his chair, made two steps forward, and then stood still, while Sir Thomas was hospitably shaking hands with Tiny. Julia told them all in rather a hurried manner, how she had fetched her from the Priory, and how she meant to take her to town the next day. Dinner was announced almost immediately.

"Miss Kenneth," said Matthew, as he took Julia

into the dining-room, "do you know what you have done?"

"Oh yes," said Julia. "I am not at all innocent. Make the best of your time."

It was quite a strange new thing to Tiny to be in a house full of friendly people, who did not catch up her words ill-naturedly, or watch every movement of her hands or eyes. Sir Thomas was quite ready to be kind to her, though he disliked her belongings. Julia called away the dogs when they went near her, but peace and kindness made Tiny bold enough to stroke the shaggy ears of a great Newfoundland, who sat down beside her, and laid his black nose on the table, in alarming proximity to her plate.

Matthew, in high spirits, was talking quite agreeably, and Will had his jokes with Julia and Sir Thomas. He seemed to be perfectly at home with them both. In fact, when Tiny had eyes and ears to spare from her own special attraction, it seemed to her that she had never seen Julia look so animated as when she was talking to Will. And it was not only brightness, it was gentleness, which showed itself for once in Miss Kenneth's dark, decided face and careless manner.

"Tiny, did you ever meet a man with an enthusiasm?" said Julia after dinner, as they sat by the drawing-room fire. "No, you wouldn't be attracted, you have too much yourself, but to a cold-hearted being like me it is rather delightful. I laughed at it at first, but now I see"—and she nodded.

"What do you mean, exactly?" said Tiny.

"A man who cares so heartily for one thing that there is nothing he would not give up to it—life, fortune, and so on. I daresay it is great nonsense, but it

is so jolly, somehow, after all the dried-up sticks of prudence and selfishness. I like it, Tiny—yes, I like it. What am I talking about? Oh, Mr. Thorpe and his quarry-people."

"Papa does not think he is very wise, to spend all that money," said Tiny gravely. "And he has been paying a debt of Colonel Dalbiac's to papa. I am afraid Colonel Dalbiac is not very wise; he seems so extravagant."

"Wise! Oh no, as foolish as he can be, I daresay," said Julia. "Enthusiastic people are never wise. Look at my aunt. But it interests one more in a man—I suppose because it is rarer. Tell me about the girl. Is she good enough for him? Is she really like that picture?"

"Yes, I think so. She is like a lady in a dream; like a fairy-tale princess, you know, who looks at you with wonderful eyes that tell a whole story. One of those people who can make you understand anything they choose, without speaking," said Tiny, gazing into the fire, and unconsciously talking Petrarch. "Tall, very slight and fair, brown hair, so soft, with little wavy bits all underneath. A small thin face, rather sad, and not exactly sweet, but the sort of face you can't help loving, and carrying about with you everywhere. I should not think," said Tiny, considering, "that there was any one else like her in the world."

"She must be rather remarkable," said Julia, staring at her companion. "I am not sure that I should love her, though."

"Perhaps you would not. Mr. Thorpe does, you see."

"What an odd girl you are, Tiny!"

"He told me once that he was going back to Paris in a year," Tiny went on. "That was long before we really knew about it."

"It seems like a rather odd arrangement. Does she care about him, I wonder?" said Julia.

"I don't know."

Julia sat still for a moment. Then she got up and looked at herself in the glass over the chimneypiece.

"I wonder how I should be described," she said. "A fuzzy head like a negro, two black goggles, red cheeks, no particular expression. I am sure I never made any one understand without speaking. On the contrary, I generally have to shout."

"You are very good-looking," said Tiny, glancing up with a smile.

"Thank you. Did you think I was fishing for a compliment? Dear me, papa, what is the matter?"

The door was opened hastily, and Sir Thomas came in, followed by the two young men. He was evidently in a fuss.

"Thorpe has had a telegram," he said, hurrying across the room. Tiny retired a few steps to a sofa in a corner. Matthew made his way round and joined her there, while the other three stood by the fire. In answer to Julia's eager look, Will handed her his telegram. It was from Paris, from Miss Dalbiac.

"My father has had an accident. He is very ill, and wishes to see you. Could you come?"

Julia held the paper in her hand, looking down at it. There was a slight extra flush in her face when she gave it back to Will, and she spoke with a little effort.

"How did you get it?"

"My uncle sent it on here."

"When are you going?"

"As early as I can to-morrow. I must say good-bye, Miss Kenneth," said Will.

There was a wonderfully bright look in his face, but a sort of absent-mindedness, too, which might well show his friends that his thoughts were gone before, where the rest of him was so gladly to follow. Julia and her father both looked at him silently for a moment.

"Julia and I will keep an eye on your building," said Sir Thomas. "Perhaps your uncle may take it up when you are gone: who knows!"

"I wish he would," said Will. "Of course I shall not be long away. I can't."

"No, no, your chief interest is here," said Sir Thomas.

Will did not respond to this, but shook hands and wished them all good-bye. Tiny, very much excited, begged him to remember her to Miss Dalbiac, and hoped the Colonel would soon be better.

It was a comfort that Matthew did not think it necessary to go home with his cousin, but kept his place beside her on the sofa, and talked quietly to her a great deal. This was possible, for Sir Thomas went out with Will, and did not return for some time; and Julia, sitting down by the fire with a pet dog in her lap, seemed lost in thought, or in the pleasure of its society.

Late that night, when Matthew was gone, and Tiny in a dream of happiness was safe in the pink room, Julia came down again to the drawing-room, where she had left her father. Sir Thomas was sitting by

the fire with a newspaper in his hand, over which he yawned dismally several times. He looked like a rough sleepy old dog. Julia stood on the white curly rug, looking down at him.

"Any message to Aunt Esther, papa?"

"Nothing particular. My love. I wrote to her to-day. Mind you are not troublesome to her, Julia, and don't let that girl be in her way. Kindness like hers ought not to be presumed upon. If you had consulted me, I should have said that you might have gone by yourself, as was proposed."

"Don't be cross," said Julia. "It was an inspiration. I had no time to consult anybody. Besides, I know Aunt Esther will be pleased. She wants to see Tiny safe through her troubles. Mr. Perrott will come round some day to the match with the curate, but till he does, they make poor Tiny wretched enough at home. I have given her a morsel of happiness this evening, quite in Aunt Esther's fashion."

Sir Thomas grunted.

"Listen, and you shall have something to grunt about," said Julia. "I bet you half-a dozen pair of gloves, that Mrs. Thorpe comes back with Mr. Thorpe to Mallam."

"What nonsense are you talking?" growled Sir Thomas, quite savagely.

"I'm convinced of it. Are you angry with him? I gave you credit for more sense. They send for him, you see, as if he belonged to them. What objection have you to make?"

"The young fellow must be a fool, to think of marrying at all. Has she any fortune?"

"None, that I ever heard of. The Perrotts tell me her father is over head and ears in debt."

"Then I wonder you are not ashamed of spreading such a story. Can't a fellow go to see his old friends, without having such reports spread about him?"

"But papa, he told everybody himself"——

"I won't hear another word about it," said Sir Thomas, getting up and throwing the newspaper into a corner. "Half-a-dozen! I bet you a dozen pair of gloves that the whole thing is a—an absurd mistake from beginning to end."

"Don't be too sure," said Julia. "Wait and see."

"Good-night, my dear. Go to bed. What are Mr. Thorpe's affairs to us?"

"What indeed!" said Julia, and she went rather slowly upstairs.

CHAPTER III.

IN ESTHER'S DRAWING-ROOM.

"She makes her life one sweet record
And deed of charity."

LONGFELLOW.

IT was getting dusk the next afternoon, when the two girls found themselves comfortably established at the end of their journey, in the drawing-room of a large house in a quiet old-fashioned square. Tiny, who had been feeling very nervous as they drove from the station, was quite reassured by Esther's reception. She came down the stairs to meet them, in her long grey gown, kissed and welcomed her niece, and then, turning to Tiny with a smile, put her hands on her shoulders and kissed her too.

"Clementina is in a terrible fright, Aunt Esther," said Julia. "I brought her quite out of my own head. I knew you would be glad to see her. She is not well, and wants cheering up."

"You were quite right," said Miss Kenneth. "We will cheer her up and make her well."

So Tiny found herself a welcome guest in the old house. All the rooms above the drawing-room floor were occupied by the children. Their feet could be heard jumping about upstairs, and their merry voices sounded now and then when a door was opened in the distance.

The drawing-room was a large room with a polished

floor, and an island of carpet in the middle. It was very plainly furnished, with hardly any ornaments, except a few good pictures, but there was a piano, and low book-cases quite full, and books about the room. A grave-looking child of fourteen, in a cap and apron, brought in the tea-tray. Julia drank her tea and warmed herself, and stared about the room. Tiny watched Miss Kenneth as she sat by the table.

"Do you think my room looks civilised, Julia?" said Esther.

"Pretty well. To be sure, you have got a new carpet. I think it does on the whole look smarter. Is it for me?"

"Not exactly. I got the carpet before I knew you were coming. But I have felt a wish lately that my house should not be repulsive. I want people to come to it. And they have been coming. I have had a great many visitors. I have been showing them that my work is not annoying or disagreeable."

"You won't make many converts, Aunt Esther."

"I don't know about that," said Esther, smiling. "At any rate, I have made one interesting acquaintance. My old friend Lady Mansell brought a wonderful man with her the other day. Young, and so agreeable, and so clever; in Parliament, and was Under Secretary for something in the last ministry. When his party comes in again, he is sure to be in office again. At present he seems to occupy himself in taking the most intelligent interest in everything."

"What a paragon!" said Julia. "Did you agree in your views on starving children?"

"Not very well, because you know how I hate institutions, and great orphanages especially. A man like

that could not be expected to enter into my idea of personal training. He thinks of masses, while I think of this child and that child. So we did not agree, and I daresay he thought my ways foolish and dreamy. But he was very nice, and very much interested in everything I told him."

"What is his name?"

"Spenser Corbet. He asked if he might come and see me again. There he is, perhaps."

There was a knock, but the visitor was a far less distinguished personage. It was only "Mr. Thorpe." Julia, however, muttered to herself, "much better worth seeing." Her aunt glanced at her in astonishment, but Will was in the room.

"I thought I should find you arrived," he said to Julia. "And I hoped Miss Kenneth would not mind my calling, as I had an hour to spare. I have had another telegram"——

"I am afraid my aunt knows nothing about the first," said Julia, seeing Esther's mystified face. "We are only just come. Mr. Thorpe heard last night, Aunt Esther, when he was dining with us, that his friend Colonel Dalbiac was very ill. He was to start for Paris directly. Well, what is the last news?" she asked, looking at Will.

He was very pale and grave, and he answered in a low voice. "It is all over. He is dead."

"Oh, poor dear Miss Dalbiac!" sighed Tiny in the background.

"And is his daughter left quite alone?" said Esther, after a pause.

Julia stared at Will for a minute, as he stood by

the table, and then suddenly turned her head away and stared at the fire.

"Yes. But of course I am going," said Will. "I got the telegram as I went to the station this morning. So I changed my course, and went to Oxford, to tell my uncle Russell Thorpe. He used to know them very well. He said he should like to go with me. So he is coming up by the next train, and we are going over by the mail to-night."

"Then you will stay and dine with us," said Miss Kenneth, kindly.

"No, thank you. You are very good. But I am to meet him, and we shall dine together before we start. He is not much used to going about," said Will.

"At least, sit down and have some tea," said Esther, and Will was ready enough to do that.

He hardly knew why he had come, except that there was time to spare, and that he felt himself linked to the Kenneths by the unexpected friendliness they had shown him ever since he came to Mallam. His elders had behaved to them badly enough, and he felt anxious to show them every attention in his power.

"You will be writing to your father," he said to Julia. "You will tell him, perhaps. But he will see it in the paper."

Julia nodded, thinking to herself, "As to those gloves, I may as well get them."

His old friend's death was of course a shock to Will, and he sat rather silent, Tiny looking on awe-struck, and Esther watching him with sympathetic eyes, wondering, wondering, what would come next.

Several times in his letters her brother had hinted at what he wished as the likeliest thing to happen, but she could not feel sure that he was right. Antigone haunted her, Will's bright grateful glance, his strange manner before the picture, as if it was something sacred. Certainly Julia had agreed with her, and had talked of Miss Dalbiac as sure to be lady of Mallam one of these days. What did it all mean? There was something odd in Julia's manner, but Will at least was quite frank and open.

"My uncle Russell is a famous old fellow," he said presently, brightening up a little. "He always used to dislike them—the Dalbiacs—and he did not like my having anything to do with them. I did not half like going to him to-day, but I thought it was best. He knew them, and he would tell me what to do—because she is awfully alone"—said the young man, lowering his voice and leaning his head on his hand. "And he said, 'Well, I think the best thing I can do is to go with you. I have age, you see, and that is a great deal. I can do anything for her that is necessary.' Wasn't it jolly of him? He never stirs out of Oxford from one year's end to another."

"Very good of him," said Miss Kenneth. "And do you mean that this poor Miss Dalbiac is really quite alone? What will she do? Has she no relations?"

"She must have some, but I suppose they are in England," said Will. "The poor Colonel, you see, he never got on with his wife's people, or with his own. And she knows nobody there but a few French artists. They are very good in their way. You know, Miss Perrott. You saw some of them."

"Oh yes," said Tiny. "But she is like a princess."

"Of course she could not live among them for ever, though she is very fond of them. The Colonel was talking to me one day about her not being in her proper place. He knew it was all his own fault."

"What was her mother's name?"

"Lady Elizabeth—let me see—Corbet, I think. Yes, her father was Lord Fareham. But he died ages ago, and the title went away to some other branch of the family. There was an aunt that the Colonel used to talk about—Lady Elizabeth's sister. I know nothing about her."

"What a ridiculous little world it is!" said Julia, who had not appeared to be listening. "That Mr. Corbet you were talking of is probably Miss Dalbiac's cousin."

"Of course he is," said Esther. "Lady Mansell told me. He is the present Lord Fareham's nephew and heir."

"Well!" said Will, "I wish I could say that Miss Dalbiac's relations did not matter a straw to her or any one else. But I suppose I must not. Good-bye, Miss Kenneth," he said, getting up. "My uncle's train is due at Paddington in twenty minutes. If I am not on the platform he will lose his luggage and himself too."

"Wait one moment," said Esther. "If Miss Dalbiac comes to England, and if there is any difficulty about her going to her relations, pray tell her that I shall be most happy to receive her here."

"Indeed I will. You are too kind," said Will.

He shook hands with Julia and Tiny, wishing them good-bye again. Somehow it seemed weeks instead of

hours since they had parted last night in the drawing-room at Selbridge.

"Mr. Thorpe has forgotten all about his cottages," said Tiny, when he was gone.

"Of course, Tiny," said Julia. "He has something more interesting to think about. But you would have been amused, Aunt Esther, if you could have seen our goings on for the last few weeks. Everybody's head full of bricks and mortar, tables covered with plans, the keeper in a rage with papa because he neglects the shooting, and stands staring for hours at the men working in the Long Croft."

"And what does Mr. Lennard think of it all?" said Esther.

"Oh, he stays in his shell, and lets things go on as they like."

They were interrupted in their talk by another visitor—the distinguished Mr. Corbet himself.

Will had met him just outside the house door, and seeing him turn up the steps, had wondered for a moment who he was.

In the drawing-room, Miss Kenneth received her new acquaintance very cordially, and he seemed by no means sorry to come out of the cold depressing fog into the region of firelight and five o'clock tea.

Julia, who always laughed, if she could, at her aunt's paragons, had to acknowledge to herself that there was something satisfactory about this man. He looked two or three and thirty, and was tall, with dark eyes, hair, and beard. Though his manner was perfectly easy and natural, there was a certain dignity and decision, which seemed to show that he was capable of ruling other people, as well as himself. Esther

and he had plenty to talk about, and Tiny looked on in silent awe and admiration, having never before found herself so near a Member of Parliament, much less an ex-Under Secretary.

"Do you take an interest in your relations, Mr. Corbet?" said Esther, presently.

"Certainly, a proper interest. But I have very few. Do you know any of them?" he said, smiling.

"Well, not exactly."

"If you find anybody with claims on me, please remember that just now I am in the opposition. I could not do much for them indeed."

"Oh, don't be frightened. I was only going to ask if you know any sisters of a Lady Elizabeth Corbet, who married Colonel Dalbiac, and died some years ago."

"There were only two sisters," said Mr. Corbet, looking rather surprised. "I never saw Lady Elizabeth; it must be eighteen or twenty years since she died. Lady Anne is my dearest friend. She is more like my mother than my distant cousin. We spend a great deal of our time together."

"Indeed! Then you can tell me—does she ever hear or see anything of her niece Miss Dalbiac? Forgive me if I seem to be curious about your family history, but I happen to be very much interested," said Esther, blushing a little.

The two girls looked on and listened silently. Mr. Corbet's face was rather grave, and he hesitated a moment before he made any answer.

"Lady Elizabeth's marriage was rather unfortunate," he said. "Colonel Dalbiac was disliked by her family —I believe with reason. He is one of those people

who can't keep straight in money matters—one of the worst faults a man can have. I think Lady Anne used to write to him now and then—she could not help feeling interested in her sister's child. But Colonel Dalbiac took his daughter abroad, and when we heard of them last, there was a talk of her becoming a professional artist. Do you know her?" The question was asked rather drily.

"No," said Esther. "I have never seen her. But I can tell you some news which you evidently have not heard. Miss Dalbiac has lost her father. He died last night, I suppose, Julia?"

"I suppose so, as the telegram came early this morning," said Julia.

"Colonel Dalbiac dead!" repeated Mr. Corbet. "It is news to me, indeed; was it anything sudden?"

"An accident—I don't know what," answered Julia. "Mr. Corbet is thoroughly mystified, Aunt Esther. He is wondering which of us had the telegram, and how we are connected with his cousins."

"Thank you. I wish you would make it clear to me," said the young man earnestly.

"Well—at Selbridge, where we live, we have a neighbour, Mr. Thorpe, who is a great friend of ours. You must have met him as you came in just now."

"Certainly. I did."

"His father was a brother officer of Colonel Dalbiac's. After his death, this Mr. Thorpe and his mother lived near the Dalbiacs in Bath, and they have always been friends. He has been to Paris to see them. When this accident happened, Colonel Dalbiac wished to see Mr. Thorpe, and Miss Dalbiac telegraphed to him. He got the message last night, when he was

dining with my father. This morning he got another to say that the Colonel was dead. He called just now to tell us, and he means to cross over to Paris to-night."

"Thank you. I understand," said Mr. Corbet, when Julia stopped, fixing her eyes upon him rather fiercely.

"Miss Dalbiac will most likely write to her aunt," suggested Esther.

"Perhaps she may. You are not acquainted with her?" he said, looking at Julia.

"No, but my friend Miss Perrott is," answered Julia, with a glance at Tiny.

She, poor little thing, was overwhelmed with confusion. Everybody looked at her. Mr. Corbet turned round in his chair quite eagerly.

"Then I hope you will tell me something about her. Is she like an English-woman?"

"No," said Tiny, and there she stopped.

"Ah! I was afraid of that."

"Why, Tiny," broke in Julia, "have you forgotten all you told me last night? Mr. Corbet, she was raving about Miss Dalbiac. There is nobody in the world that she admires so much. A princess in a fairy tale, a lady in a picture. By the by, I have seen her portrait painted as Antigone. A very expressive face, certainly, if it is like her."

"A beautiful face, I thought," said Esther.

"Antigone!" repeated Mr. Corbet, still looking at Tiny. "And she paints, herself, does she not?"

"Yes," said Tiny, shyly. "When I saw her, she was copying a picture at the Louvre."

"And you really admired her?"

"Oh, very, very much."

"You must think it odd, Miss Kenneth," said Mr. Corbet, "that I should ask these questions about Miss Dalbiac. But please understand that I am thinking of my cousin Lady Anne. If it turns out that this young lady is in any way dependent on her—which I am afraid is not unlikely—it will matter a good deal what sort of person she is."

"Yes, I quite understand that," said Esther. "But from all I have heard of Miss Dalbiac, I think you need not be at all alarmed."

"I am very glad of it. My cousin is one of those people whom one always feels anxious to shield from trouble. She is far too delightful to be disturbed and ruffled and turned out of her course for anybody." He smiled, for Esther was looking at him doubtfully. "What have I said, Miss Kenneth?"

"I was only thinking that yours was a new definition of a delightful character—not to be troubled."

"Ah, don't misunderstand me. No one could be more amiable. I spoke of my own feeling, not of hers. I wish you were acquainted with her."

"I should like to know her very much. I am sure she is delightful," said Esther.

"She is an invalid, and goes out very little," said Mr. Corbet. "She lives at St. George's Palace. I am going to dine with her to-night, and I shall tell her this news from Paris. I am glad to have heard it, for a letter would be a shock to her."

His face softened as he talked of his old friend. When he was not smiling or talking, it certainly was a stern face, singularly set and grave for a man of his age. But a pleasant smile, and an open courteous

manner, altered it entirely when he spoke. He only stayed a few minutes longer, and went away without a word of Esther's system and her charges, which he had professedly come to talk about.

"Miss Dalbiac fills everybody's brains to-day!" said Julia, when he was gone.

"Do you admire my friend, Julia?" said her aunt.

"He is not my sort," said Julia, shaking her head. "I admire him a little, perhaps, because he is not a prig, but I don't like him. One of those correct magnificent people, who are so easily shocked. He would not exactly bore me, but he would enrage me, if I had much to do with him. I should certainly take to smoking, and as you know, I have stopped just short of that."

"At least oblige me by waiting till you are at home again," said Esther smiling, and glancing at Tiny.

"It depends on how often Mr. Corbet comes here," said Julia. "The third time I think he will find me with a cigarette."

CHAPTER IV.

PARIS IN AUTUMN.

"Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too."

KEATS.

WILL had not found it necessary to show his friends the second telegram, which he carried in his pocket. It was from M. Simonet. "Colonel Dalbiac died at seven this evening. Therefore you need not come. Miss Dalbiac will write."

This it was which had taken Will to Oxford, to the only person whose advice he really cared for. His uncle received him rather coldly, being thoroughly out of patience with the Dalbiacs and with him, especially since that affair of the £500. But under that wrinkled, parchment surface there was a kind heart. Will, in the depths of dismalness, laid the two telegrams before him, painted Lisa's complete loneliness in the most effective colours, though with few words, and ended, "You see, uncle Russell, I must go. I have made up my mind. You don't think I shall be displeasing her, or doing wrong?"

"Displeasing her!" repeated Mr. Thorpe. "Why, Willy, if she is not glad to see you, she must be a heartless person indeed. You can only give up all thoughts of her, after that."

Then he went on to say that if Will liked, he would go with him, and the young man gratefully accepted

this offer, knowing what a sacrifice it was to his uncle to leave his books and all his Oxford interests, and what the long-suffering affection for himself was, that prompted it.

So they started off together, that foggy autumn night, Uncle Russell wrapped up to the ears in great-coats and comforters, with a warm travelling-cap drawn down over his velvet skull-cap. They arrived in Paris early in the morning. Will took his uncle to his own old hotel near the church of Saint-Roch, left him there to rest, and went out himself into the streets.

Even in Paris it was a dark and misty morning. He had fancied somehow that the sun always shone there, but now he saw that it too had gloomy and disappointing days. There were many green leaves still in the Tuileries Gardens, mixed with the masses of orange and brown; but the white palaces stood up dimly in the fog. The river, as he stood on the Pont des Arts, looked dull and slow, nature and art alike seemed unsympathising and stern. Even the faces that passed him were not so cheerful as they had been in June.

He walked slowly on, drawn by a magnet in the direction of the well-known street. Of course it was no use going there at nine o'clock in the morning, but he went there nevertheless, and took one or two turns up and down, remembering with a sad amusement how he had done the very same thing that first evening, after finding Lisa at the Louvre. He was passing the house for the second time, when Martine popped suddenly out, and met him face to face. Up went her hands and eyes.

"Ah, heavens! it is Monsieur Thorpe."

"Yes, Martine, here I am," said Will. "How is Mademoiselle?"

"Monsieur has taken my breath away. We all thought he was in England. Mademoiselle, poor angel, Monsieur can imagine how she is. He knows? He has heard the news?"

"Yes, I have heard," said Will. Martine fixed her eyes on his flushed face, and nodded violently. "Tell me," he went on, "is she alone? Is any one with her? Monsieur Simonet?"

"No!" said Martine, shaking her head with an irreverent smile. "Monsieur Simonet is not there. She has seen him once. He is very good, she says. But the poor dear child is by herself, and sad enough, I can tell you. Monsieur would like to see her? Come in then."

"Is it too early?" began Will, but Martine turned round and ran upstairs, and he was ready enough to follow her, exchanging a friendly nod with the concierge by the way.

Martine went straight in through the salle-à-manger, stepping as quietly as she could, tapped at the inner door, and opened it an inch.

"Mademoiselle—voilà Monsieur Will."

Then she opened the door wide, and signed to Will to go in.

Lisa was sitting on her sofa, with a pile of letters and papers on a table before her. Her eyes looked very worn and tired, and filled suddenly with tears, as she looked up and saw her old friend standing there. Then she rose and held out both hands to him.

"Dear Will, how good of you! But you ought not to have come."

"I could not do anything else," said Will, holding her hands tight for a moment, and looking at her steadily.

"Oh—you got M. Simonet's message?"

"Yesterday morning, just before I started. You must forgive me," said Will. "I could not bear to think of your being here alone. And do you know, I promised him once that if anything ever happened, I would run over and look after you. He must have had a presentiment. If I could only have got here in time to see him!"

"Poor papa!" said Lisa in a low voice. "Sit down, and let me tell you all about it."

Will took a chair close by, and leaned his arms on the table, shading his face with his hand.

Lisa told him the history, in a voice broken by tears. It was a street accident, very rare in Paris. A little ragged boy, standing in the street, was all but run over by an omnibus. Colonel Dalbiac sprang from the pavement, seized the child and threw him out of the way, but was himself knocked down and trampled on by the horses. He was at first unconscious, and as nobody knew him, he was carried to an hospital. He regained his senses after a time, and his daughter was sent for, but he only lingered a few hours, and died that same evening, as Will had heard. A brave and generous death, if it was the end of a selfish life: a death not unworthy of an English soldier. Lisa told Will that the poor little child was deaf and dumb, but had played in the streets all his life without any mishap. She told him, too, that her father was to be buried that afternoon, and that M. Simonet had very kindly made all arrangements for her.

"I must go and see M. Simonet," said Will. "Lisa, you remember Uncle Russell. He came over with me. I left him at the hotel. He thought he might perhaps be of some use to you."

"It was very kind of him," said Lisa.

She could not be insensible to a change in Will, as she told him her story, and as he sat listening and gazing at her with a longing affection which was not allowed to find its way into words. He was certainly better looking; broader, more sunburnt, altogether more manly. His manner, too, was steadier and more self-reliant, and had lost some of its boyishness. And Will himself, coming into the room, had almost forgotten his old shyness with Lisa, the dread of being laughed at which had been a slightly discordant element in his young adoration. She was softened by sorrow, and had received him as a welcome old friend. Besides, anxiety for her had at once swallowed up any selfish or self-conscious feelings that Will might have had. Here she was alone and desolate; her friends, if she had any, foreigners and poor; and she herself unfit indeed for any hardship and privation. For she looked more fragile than ever, more shadowy and delicate, her hands were thinner and whiter, the black dress seemed to hang loosely on her slight figure.

"You have not been ill, have you?" Will could not help saying.

"No, I am very well. Only tired sometimes. You know I am always thin," she said, smiling. "Tell me, what have you been doing? Anything good and great?"

"Nothing at all. But I want to hear about you. Have you made up your mind what you are going to do?"

"Ah, Will, how difficult it is! I feel inclined to stay here."

"Here! oh, Lisa, listen to me."

"No. I will not listen to you," she said, with a look and smile that brought old days in that room vividly back to Will. He was silent, and she went on, with a faint flush that rose and died away suddenly. "I have the best chance here of getting on with my painting. I want to paint a picture, a real one of my own. M. Simonet is very encouraging. You remember Madame Le Breton and her little daughters?"

"Yes."

"I have been thinking that we might all live together. Vévette and I would help each other—and poor Mimi is fond of me too. Madame Le Breton would do all our housekeeping. I have said nothing about it to them, but I did hint at it to M. Simonet, and he thought it might be a good plan. Now, I suppose I must consult you and your uncle. But perhaps I shall have my own way all the same."

"It would be very good for them, no doubt," said Will. "But it would not be right for you. You were not made to live among poor French artists."

"You forget, Will. I have nothing—no interest in the world but my painting. And do you know, I think French art is better than English. And my Le Bretons are poor, certainly, but they are very respectable. Vévette is the best little woman in France."

Lisa paused, but Will said nothing. He did not know what to say. She went on presently. "I have an aunt in England, you know; my mother's sister. I wrote to her yesterday, for the first time since I was a child. Papa wished me to write at once. I think it

depends a little on her whether I carry out that plan of mine. He said that if she wished me to go to her for a time, he hoped that I would go. Knowing that, of course I should. It is a very strange feeling to be thrown suddenly adrift on the world."

"Lisa, don't say that—to me—when you know"——

"Yes. But I did not want you to come. I had not forgotten"——

"Neither had I," said Will. "Your sketch is hanging up in my room at home. I know there is a lot of work to be done first. But all this might make a difference."

"No, no, not the least difference," she said, with a slight impatience which Will did not understand.

He got up and walked away to the window, standing there for a moment silently. Then he came back and stood near her, looking down gravely at her troubled face.

"Tell me," he said, "can I be of any use to you? Is there anything I can do for you here? If not, I'll go and see M. Simonet."

"Thank you, Will. Forgive me. I am not quite myself to-day."

She held out her hand to him. He bent down and kissed it, and then left her without saying any more.

CHAPTER V.

MR. THORPE'S MEDIATION.

"For friends in all the aged you'll meet,
And lovers in the young."

SHERIDAN.

MR. THORPE, M. Simonet, and Will were the only mourners who followed Colonel Dalbiac from the hospital where he died to his grave at Auteuil. Lisa spent the time by Mimi Le Breton's bedside. The two French girls were almost wild with sympathy. They could not even talk as usual, but Vévette sat on the floor, caressing Lisa's hand, and Mimi gazed at her with wistful eyes, which had forgotten to be cross or discontented. There was regret for themselves mingled with their grief for her. Surely now that the colonel was dead she would go to England, and then they would never see her again. Lisa herself was in a strange frame of mind. She hardly liked to confess to herself how much she was moved by Will's faithful devotion, and yet she was sure she did not really care for him. Her ideal of a prince among men was not approached by poor Will, however improved he might be. He was more like an affectionate younger brother. "And I wish he was my brother!" sighed Lisa to herself.

She had other anxieties too. She had a very faint idea of what debts her father might have left behind him. He had never talked to her of money affairs, but he had told her that the debt to Mr. Perrott was

paid; he did not say how. That was one trouble off her mind: but now she waited anxiously, fearing that one debt after another would come to light, and only hoping that her diamonds would be enough to clear them all. She was resolved that she would not be under any obligation to Will or his relations. She owed him the ring, and that was certainly enough.

In the afternoon of the next day, M. Simonet was sitting with her, and she had been talking over her plans with him, her hopes and fears for the future. The good artist sat with his arms folded, listening to her. He could not quite understand how it was that Will Thorpe did not take her away to England at once —not that he wished for such an event—on the contrary, he felt as if art would lose all its attractive grace, he himself his best inspiration, with the return of this dear mademoiselle to her native land. But he never thought of telling her so; with the modesty of a true genius, he was contented to call himself her humble friend. Poor Monsieur Simonet!

As they talked, Will was bringing his uncle to call upon her. Mr. Thorpe was rather nervous, and kept fast hold of his nephew's arm on their way through the streets.

"I remember her well," he said. "She was a pretty little girl. But you are quite sure she has given up that ridiculous habit of caricaturing everybody. It is a dangerous talent, one that ought not to be used. An unladylike talent, I think I might say."

"My dear uncle, you have only to see her; then you will be satisfied. I can't say any more," answered Will.

Mr. Thorpe climbed, with many pantings, up the

steep staircase of Lisa's abode. Martine received them at her outer door, and afterwards remarked, "Quel vieux drôle!" Not a very inappropriate description of the good old college don, with his velvet cap, his spectacles, and the long nose which Lisa had once tried to immortalise.

Mr. Thorpe followed his nephew into the salon, and glared rather fiercely at M. Simonet, who got up and made him a low bow.

"You remember my uncle?" said Will to Miss Dalbiac.

She smiled and said, "Oh yes, perfectly."

Then she came forward to shake hands with him, and Uncle Russell instantly fell under the charm.

"It is very good of you to remember me, I am sure," he said. "I can't pretend that I should have known you."

After a few minutes, M. Simonet had the politeness to go away and leave them to themselves. Mr. Thorpe sat down near Lisa, and Will went and stood in his old place by the window, and listened to her low voice as she talked about her father. Mr. Thorpe asked a good many questions, and they were those of an old friend. There was no fear of any caricaturing from Lisa sitting there, graceful, depressed, her hands lying before her in melancholy weariness, the long eyelashes drooped on her cheek.

"My nephew tells me that you are very much devoted to your art," said Mr. Thorpe, "and that you have some thoughts of staying in Paris to practise it. Don't mind my asking if you really think that a wise plan."

"Indeed I cannot think of anything wiser," said

Lisa, sighing. "And I must tell you that my friend M. Simonet sees a great deal of sense in it. What is the use of my pretending to be anything but what I am—a poor artist! I shall have very little to live on. It was impossible for my father to live comfortably on his income. And you see—as an artist in London I should have no chance at all. Here, with Monsieur Simonet's help, I may get on in time."

"Monsieur Simonet is all very well. But, my dear, this is not a fitting position for a young lady of your family and appearance," said Mr. Thorpe, with a little bow.

"I am afraid Will has infected you," said Lisa, with a sudden bright smile. "He always tries to set me up above my companions here. Of course I know what you mean, and from one point of view you are quite right. But what is the use of thinking about one's family, when one's bread has to be earned?"

Mr. Thorpe screwed up his mouth and looked at her. "It is your own choice," he said, under his breath, and Lisa slightly bowed her head.

"But you have relations," he went on aloud. "What will they say to this?"

"I have written to my aunt, but she has not answered me yet. I suppose she has hardly had time," said Lisa.

At that moment Martine opened the door and brought in an English letter. Lisa held it in her hand for a moment, and looked at the monogram, "A. C.," on the envelope.

"Shall we leave you to read it, and call some other time?" suggested Mr. Thorpe.

"No, pray don't go. It is from my aunt. I will tell you what she says."

This was the letter, dated from St. George's Palace, and written in a small old-fashioned hand.

"My dear Lisa—I hope you have already written to me, your mother's only sister, but the sad news I have just heard determines me to write at once, without waiting for your letter. I am shocked and grieved beyond measure to hear of your poor father's sudden death, and am most anxious for particulars. At present I can think of no one but you, for the position of a young girl left alone in a city like Paris must be a most painful one. I hope you are already convinced that your proper home is with me. I at any rate hasten to claim you as my own. As soon as I hear from you again, my maid shall set out to fetch you. I would come myself, but unfortunately I cannot bear a journey. Always believe in the love and sympathy of your affectionate aunt,

"ANNE CORBET."

"Nothing could be kinder," said Lisa.

She gave the letter to Mr. Thorpe, signing to him, when he had read it, to pass it on to Will.

"Very proper. Quite what I should have expected." said Mr. Thorpe gravely. "Now I hope you consider that this decides your future."

"My present, at least," said Lisa. "Yes, I think I must go to my aunt. Perhaps it will be only for a time! But my affairs here must be settled first. I don't want to leave any debts behind me."

"Debts, eh?" said Mr. Thorpe.

A slight cough from Will reminded his uncle of the charge he had laid upon him, to say nothing about the £700. Mr. Thorpe thought this very foolish and romantic, but Will had exacted a promise from him, which must of course be kept.

"Yes," said Lisa. "I can't help fearing that there must be some. Martine and I have paid all the bills that we were concerned in. Our rent is paid, too. But my dear father never talked to me about those things, and I cannot tell what he may have left unpaid. I am very ignorant about money matters, unfortunately for myself," she added, sighing. "I think M. Simonet knows more of my affairs than any one. Papa used to talk to him."

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Thorpe, kindly, "suppose you put it all into my hands. I am a very old friend, and you need have no scruples in trusting me. I will consult with M. Simonet, and set everything right, and then I shall have much pleasure in escorting you to England. I think that is the best arrangement that can be made."

"Thank you very much. I think so too. You could not do me a greater kindness," said Lisa earnestly, holding out her hand to him.

Uncle Russell shook and pressed it kindly. If the caricature had not yet been forgiven, it would from that moment have been quite wiped out from his memory. Henceforth Lisa had no more faithful admirer and friend.

Will got quite jealous of his uncle as he heard her talking low and confidentially, saying that if money was wanted, she had her mother's diamonds, and that some of them at least could be sold at once. Poor

Will, who had come to Paris intending to do everything for Lisa himself, felt quite superseded and pushed out of the way. Uncle Russell, now that he was quite awake and away from his books, became so lively and business-like, so much up in the ways of the world, that Will felt once more like a stupid awkward lad who could do nothing but lounge about and look on.

Lisa wrote to Lady Anne, frankly accepting her kindness, but declining the offer of the maid, as her father's old friend Mr. Russell Thorpe was in Paris, and would bring her safe to London. This old friend, meanwhile, busied himself about her affairs, and was very soon satisfied that there were no debts of any consequence. Will's paying that £500 had enabled Colonel Dalbiac to keep himself pretty straight. He had cleared off several long accounts only a week before his death.

"He would never have repaid you, my dear boy," said Mr. Thorpe, as they walked through the streets. "Now I think you will be doing a foolish thing, if you leave Miss Dalbiac in ignorance of that affair. It would be much better for her to sell some of those diamonds, which are of no use to her, and to make herself morally clear."

"I've told you what I think about that, uncle Russell," answered Will. "I choose that she should keep her diamonds. I don't care about the money. If she ever belongs to me, why, it is the same thing. If not, nothing matters."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Thorpe. They walked on silently till they reached the turn into Lisa's street. "Now you are not coming in with me," said the uncle,

with decision. "She does not want you philandering here at all hours of the day."

"All right. No; as long as she has you she is quite satisfied."

"And well she may be," said uncle Russell. "You can call for me in half-an-hour."

Lisa had set up her easel in the salon, and was engaged in sketching her friend Vévette, who sat, an obedient little model, in the further window. When Mr. Thorpe came in, she jumped up and disappeared, carrying the painting apparatus with her.

"I am come on business," said uncle Russell.

"You are very kind to me," said Lisa.

She looked at him rather anxiously, for his manner was grave, and visions of debts began to hover before her eyes. But a few words set her mind at rest. His business was to tell her that everything was clear, and that she could go to England as soon as she pleased.

"We shall be at ease about you, when you are once established with your aunt," he said. "I shall, at least. I like people to be in their proper places. My nephew is not quite so easily satisfied."

He paused, and looked at Lisa. She raised her eyes and looked at him, half smiling and half sad.

"Will has told you"—— she said.

"My dear, I was the first person that he told, when he came from Paris in the summer. And I am not at all surprised at your answer to him. You had a right to think yourself too good for him."

"It was not that," said Lisa, blushing. "But one feels that there ought to be looking up—respect. Will seems so young in every way."

"You convinced him very strongly of what you

say," said Mr. Thorpe. "He came to me with his head full of work—he must read at once for his degree, and so on. But then came Mallam, and his uncle Lennard's generosity, which at first I thought a very bad thing for him. All further college work went to the winds."

"I suppose so," said Lisa, as Mr. Thorpe seemed to pause for an answer.

"Yes. But I have changed my mind in some ways about Will. After all, book-work is not the only work in the world. Very fortunate for him, poor lad, for he never could have done much in that way. Do you know what he has been doing since he settled at Mallam?"

"Nothing, he told me," said Lisa, smiling.

"He has devoted himself to the improvement of his uncle's estate. He has interested himself philanthropically in some poor quarry-people there; has bought some land, and out of his own funds is building houses for them. He is giving them everything he has, time, money, and thought. I don't know whether we can quite describe that as doing nothing. I don't want to exaggerate, but it seems to me that my boy is making an honest crusade against the darkness and degradation of at least one corner of the world. Yet I know that he thinks nothing of it himself. It is no special work, taken up with forethought and deliberation. It has come to him in the course of his daily life, which might have been as idle and self-indulgent as he chose to make it. I am glad he has told you nothing about it. I am very proud of Willy. That makes me prouder of him than ever."

If Will had heard all this, he would have been

astonished indeed. His uncle had certainly shown no enthusiasm about his Mallam undertakings. On the contrary, he had growled a good deal of contempt and disapprobation.

"I am very glad, indeed," said Lisa, gently.

"Don't think me a tiresome old fellow, for telling you all this. I was anxious to point out to you that Will has some character, in spite of his boyish ways."

"He is much less boyish than he was," said Lisa.

"I am glad you have noticed that. Well, my dear Miss Dalbiac, it is no business of mine. Only I can't help feeling that Willy would still belong to me, if twenty rich uncles were to make him their heir. And I know his mind is entirely taken up with you. So treat the poor boy as well as you can."

"I hope Will and I will never cease to be friends," said Lisa, "even if I cannot make up my mind to—anything else. We agreed—perhaps he told you—that we would settle nothing for a year. But, at any rate, I shall always like Will. Papa was very fond of him."

"Ah! yes, so I suppose," said Mr. Thorpe, rather hastily.

He was a little cross with himself for having said anything, and slightly angry with Lisa, who did not seem quite so much impressed with Will's philanthropy as he could have wished. She assented very gracefully to all his praises, but that was not much, after all. And the allusion to Colonel Dalbiac brought back the £700 disagreeably.

"Never meddle," said Mr. Thorpe to himself as he went downstairs, not feeling inclined to wait for Will, "and never attempt match-making. Yet I should have

thought that a young lady with nothing might have considered Willy worth looking after. But I suppose she is really a very superior person, as he says. Poor boy, poor boy!"

CHAPTER VI.

A MOONLIGHT CROSSING.

"Then, even of fellowship, O moon, tell me,
Is constant love deemed there but want of wit?
Are beauties there as proud as here they be?
Do they above love to be loved, and yet
Those lovers scorn, whom that love doth possess?"

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

LET me call it St. George's Palace, that old royal home by the river, with its wide-spreading courts, uneven pavements, rows of formal windows, here and there a lovely oriel, bowered in ivy, looking out from a corner of the wall. There the grand staircase goes up under its stately arch, leading to the hall with its dais, faded tapestry, and regal portraits. There is the chapel, dim and solemn, within rich crumbling mullions and glass that glows with blazoned coats of arms. There run the picture galleries, old suites of rooms where princes and princesses have lived their anxious lives, and there the red clock-tower rises into the quiet air. But all this old grandeur belongs to the past life of the palace. Now it is a colony of people who find it a pleasant refuge, a sort of uncloistered convent, whose inmates belong to the great world, but cannot well afford to live in it, and here have a very refined little society of their own. Perhaps a rather stiff, monotonous life, narrow in its notions, and easily shocked and affronted; but very peaceful, going on day after day in those oak-lined rooms, or walking in the

gardens with pet dogs attendant, over smooth lawns and down cypress alleys, at the end of which fountains play steadily.

Frost had silvered the grass in the gardens, a bright sun was shining, a north-west wind was blowing lightly, and bringing down the yellow leaves in showers, on the day that Lady Anne Corbet expected her niece from Paris.

The sun had been shining in Paris too, on Lisa's leave-takings. She spent several hours with Will at her dear Louvre, and said good-bye to many of her fellow-copyists, who looked sadly after her as she walked down the long gallery with her tall companion. He was not a stranger to many of them; they had always expected the young Englishman to come back and fetch Mademoiselle Dalbiac away.

At last all the farewells were done; the Le Bretons, Martine, even the concierge and his wife, smiled through their tears and wished her "bon voyage." Faithful M. Simonet attended them to the station, and stood looking after them with his hat in his hand and a very grave countenance. When he could see them no longer he put it on again and walked back to his studio, where at least he had the "Vierge au Voile."

The travellers left Paris in the evening, arrived at Calais soon after midnight, and crossed to Dover in the first hours of the morning. It was a beautiful clear night, cold and calm, the sea all round heaved gently under the moon. There were not many people on board. Mr. Thorpe went below, but Lisa preferred staying on deck, and Will made her as warm and comfortable as he could in one of the covered seats. Then he wrapped

himself in a plaid and lay down on the deck, near enough to hear her move.

The steamer panted, the water splashed and gurgled, and he lay staring at the moon. So near Lisa, with the chance of her speaking to him, he was not likely to waste his time by going to sleep. Youth and a little fatigue were too much for him, however, and he was just beginning to doze, when he was roused by a low clear call, "Will!" and scrambling up, he was by her side directly.

"Were you asleep, and have I waked you?" said Lisa regretfully.

"No. I'm wide awake."

"I am so wide awake," said Lisa with a little laugh, "that I can't bear lying here with no one to speak to. I want to see the moon. I should like to go and sit outside this."

"Come and sit under the gunwale," said Will. "Give me your wraps. It is quite quiet; there is nobody walking about."

It was quiet indeed. Everyone seemed asleep, except the man at the wheel and the boat herself as she hurried along through the water. Will settled his lady in her new place, wrapped her up well with rugs and shawls, and stood before her, smiling.

"Won't you sit down too?" said Lisa. "I have several things to say, and I may not have another opportunity."

"Shall I never see you, then, while you are at St. George's? That will be worse than Paris."

"I don't know what will happen to me. I feel as if I had left the first half of my life behind. And I am not sure how I shall behave myself as an English lady.

After all there is nothing so free as an artist life abroad. I begin to feel already like a bird in a cage."

"You must not stay there, if you are not happy," said Will.

"Oh, it will be good for me, I daresay. A different kind of training. Tell me, Will, are you happy? You look so. I wish I was more contented."

"I am happy just at this moment," said Will, slowly. "But that is because I forget the future and everything else in the world. Of course I shall never be contented till I really get what I want."

"Oh, Will, what a trouble you are to me! There is something that weighs on my mind. I should like to confess it to you now; will you listen?"

"Do you think I can bear it?" said Will, sitting down beside her.

"Foolish boy! What do you think it is?"

"That you have met some great successful fellow—heroic and clever, and all the rest of it. And that I am done for. I shall jump into the sea."

"Nothing of the kind. You remember giving me that ring?"

"Yes, dear."

"I have a story to tell you about it."

Will sat still, looking at her, and listened.

"Papa would have told you of it himself," she ended. "He was very sorry. I was obliged to tell him that it was yours."

"But it was not mine. It was yours. Now that you have told me, Lisa, will you do me one favour?"

"If I can."

"Never think of it or mention it again."

"You are very generous," said Lisa. She was silent

for a few minutes, then she startled him by saying, "So you have been fighting after all, and very bravely. What did you mean by telling me that you had done nothing at Mallam?"

"What, the cottages?" said Will. "They are not worth talking about."

"But I want you to talk to me about them. Tell me everything."

"If my lady commands it," said Will. "But I have nothing to tell that will interest you. The most commonplace history of dirty people and tumble-down houses."

"Never mind. It is your work, and I want to hear about it."

"A poor sort of work," said Will, but he obeyed orders and told his tale, and a very unadorned one it was. None of the sudden eloquence that had inspired him when he first described Lennard's Lane to Esther Kenneth. Told to Lisa, the history seemed flat, and colourless, and almost contemptible.

"And how long will it be before this is all finished?" she said, when he stopped.

"I shall not be clear of it till some time in the spring. I am an unlucky fellow, you see. That year will end, and I shall be no higher up than I was at the beginning of it."

"You will have done a good deal for other people, it seems, if nothing for yourself."

"It may turn out to be nothing for anybody."

"That is hardly possible, is it, now that you have got so far? Do you know, Will, I think it is better than going in for a degree."

"No! Do you really?"

"I think so. But of course I am not a good judge. I like you very much for doing it."

"You don't know what you are doing for me, by saying that. I thought it was a thing you would not care about, so there was not any real satisfaction in it, though I felt I must go in for it. But now it will be rather different."

"Tell me more about your life at Mallam," said Lisa. "I like to hear. That quaint little Miss Perrott —what is she doing?"

Will told her about Tiny's troubles, and talked a little about the Kenneths, speaking rather enthusiastically of Esther. It was strange to her to hear of all his friends and interests, and yet to know that she herself reigned over them all. For that she was really sorry, feeling convinced that she could hear without any regret of his being entirely taken up with the Mallam life—engaged to Miss Julia Kenneth, for instance, of whom he talked with a hearty friendliness that amused her. She persuaded herself that she would feel nothing but pleasure at such a piece of news. Yet I believe there was a lurking consciousness that she did not know yet what real loneliness was, and that this experience might be gained by the loss of the faithful lover who now sat beside her in the moonlight.

They were approaching Dover, and the boat began to wake up. Sleepy passengers struggled slowly to their feet, and grasped their bags. Will saw that his time with Lisa was drawing near its end.

"There never was such a short sea passage as this," he said. "Then Lisa, darling—I may not have a chance of speaking to you again—will you let me come to you

next May, even if I have done nothing better than this work at Mallam."

"Yes, if you still have such a silly fancy," said Lisa, rather sadly. "But remember, I don't promise you anything, even if you are the greatest man in England by that time."

"Not much danger of that. I'll have everything straight and right at the Long Croft. If I can't even manage that, I don't think I shall venture to show my face."

The moonlight talk was broken off here by the appearance of Mr. Thorpe, who had waked up with the other passengers, and hurried on deck to look after his charge. She assured him that she had been very warm and comfortable, and that Will had been entertaining her.

"That's right," said uncle Russell.

He had arranged that he and Lisa would rest for a few hours at a hotel in Dover, while Will and the luggage went on straight to Charing Cross. He did not wish Lisa to arrive at St. George's quite tired out. Lady Anne Corbet had promised to send somebody to Charing Cross to receive her niece; she could not allow her to make any part of her journey alone, and could not trouble Mr. Thorpe to escort her out of his way.

Will spent a rather dismal morning in London, and was at the station some minutes before the train arrived. He began to think that Lady Anne had forgotten her promise, and was not at all inclined to blame her for it, thinking that his uncle would be too tired to go any farther, and that he himself would have the pleasure of escorting Lisa to the end of her journey. But a cab came up at the same moment with the train,

a gentleman got out of it, and walked slowly towards the carriages. Will did not see him at first, being quite occupied in helping Lisa and his uncle out.

"Here's a state of things!" he said, taking Mr. Thorpe's bag. "The somebody has not turned up. You won't want to go down to St. George's."

He stopped short, for somebody had come up in that instant to Lisa, and had introduced himself.

"Miss Dalbiac, I think? I have the honour to be a cousin of yours, Spenser Corbet."

Lisa knew his name very well, but still was slightly puzzled. He smiled and explained himself.

"Your aunt is a very dear friend of mine. I was only too glad to be able to be of any use. If you will allow me, I shall have the pleasure of taking care of you as far as St. George's Palace."

"Thank you very much," said Lisa. "Let me introduce my friend Mr. Thorpe, and Mr. William Thorpe. I have been very fortunate all through my journey in being so well taken care of."

"We are extremely obliged to Mr. Thorpe," said Mr. Corbet. "Lady Anne's carriage is here. Your luggage"——

The footman had descended from an ancient-looking yellow coach, which Will had noticed with some amusement before the train came up. He took Lisa's things, heard from Will that the luggage was in the cloak-room, and hurried off in quest of it. They walked across the platform to the carriage, and stood talking for a minute or two.

"I think I met you the other day," said Mr. Corbet to Will, "coming out of Miss Kenneth's house in N——Square."

"Yes; I knew I had seen you before," said Will.

Lisa was speaking a few low words aside to Russell Thorpe, of thanks for all his care of her, and hopes of meeting again.

"Yes, my dear, yes," said uncle Russell, nervously. "I can't understand parting with you so suddenly. But you are among your own people, and it is all for the best. My compliments to your aunt."

In another minute the luggage was come, and Lisa had turned round to Will, Mr. Corbet quietly looking on. Of course he could not know how poor Will wished him at Jericho.

"Good-bye," she said, giving Will her hand. "You must let me know how your work goes on."

Will bowed his head. "Good-bye! thank you," he said.

Mr. Corbet handed her in, got in himself, and the carriage rolled away. It was even worse than that parting in the presence of poor Colonel Dalbiac, six months ago.

CHAPTER VII.

LADY ANNE.

"For her e'en Time grew debonair.
He, finding cheeks unclaimed of care,
With late-delayed faint roses there,
And lingering dimples,
Had spared to touch the fair old face,
And only kissed with Vauxhall grace
The soft white hand that stroked her lace,
Or smoothed her wimples."

AUSTIN DOBSON.

LADY ANNE Corbet, in her long quaint drawing-room looking out on the clock court of the palace, was waiting anxiously for her niece. The idea of having her had been at first very upsetting. But she had a talent for doing necessary things with a good grace, and even if the account that Mr. Corbet brought of Lisa had been rather forbidding, she would have written to her, and offered her a home just as cordially.

Her younger sister's uncomfortable marriage, and certain private disappointments of her own, had been the chief troubles of Lady Anne's life. She was now a wonderfully nice-looking woman, a little over sixty, rather stout, with pretty features, soft kind brown eyes, and a fair smooth complexion. Her malady was a weakness in her back, which obliged her to lie down for several hours every day, and made any special exertion impossible.

But this afternoon she was restless, and could not stay quietly on her sofa as usual. She stood at her

window, looking out at the frosty sky behind the red roofs opposite, which glowed redder than ever in the parting light of the sun. Then she walked once or twice up and down the room. It was on the first floor, and had a fine moulded ceiling covered with Cupids and wreaths and cornucopias. All the woodwork was oak, with which the walls were panelled half their height. Above this they were coloured a pale tea-green, and all over were hung with oil paintings, old crayon heads, and miniatures. The furniture was rather heavy and old-fashioned, and not at all smart; the large arm-chairs and sofas were covered with cream-coloured chintz, over which went straying a pattern of birds and flowers in many colours. The room looked thoroughly inhabited, full of pretty trifles of all kinds from any number of countries. The delightful old china was not shut jealously up in cabinets, but stood all about anywhere—Chelsea groups with their mild sweet faces, Chinese bowls, Dresden tea-things, Worcester dishes glittering in deep blue and gold.

Lady Anne's little Maltese dog, Puff, lay in a basket by the fire, and gazed round his home with placid satisfaction, following his mistress with his eyes, as her black dress glided gently here and there among the furniture. Whatever he may have felt, he was far too dignified a dog to be disturbed by her restlessness, or to betray any share in her anxiety. At the further end of the drawing-room there was a corner window, which looked out on the quiet terraces of the garden. In front of this window there was a stand of flowers, and behind them a cushioned seat in the recess, the pleasantest of corners, which always caught the last rays of the sun. Between the tops of some great elm-trees, one

caught a bright glimpse of the river and its opposite bank. Lady Anne was pausing at this window, looking at the yellow trees, and reflecting that she had had no visitors that afternoon, when a rumble of wheels startled her, and then a ring down below.

"Puff, Puff, here she is!" said Lady Anne, moving back towards the fire. "You indifferent dog! You ought to be so deeply interested, and you don't care the least. I wish I was equally happy."

Lisa was thoroughly out of Bohemia at last. Such old yellow carriages as that in which she and Mr. Corbet had driven from town, such rooms as Lady Anne's, even such dogs as Puff, are not to be found in that country. Yet there was nothing to startle or dismay the most independent spirit. Mr. Corbet was all kindness and attention. As they drove along he had given her a charming account of her aunt, and now he smiled as he opened the drawing-room door and announced, "Here is Miss Dalbiac."

"My dear," said Lady Anne, coming forward and holding out both hands, "I am very glad to see you."

She kissed Lisa affectionately, and then held her fast and looked at her for a moment. Certainly it was a face to be looked at, but not one to be understood at once, as Lady Anne saw immediately. She felt satisfied, however, that her niece's appearance would not discredit her.

"Come and sit here by me, dear Lisa," she said. "Thank you so much, Spenser, for bringing her safely. Where did you find her? At Charing Cross?"

"We met on the platform," said Mr. Corbet, sitting down in an arm-chair beside Puff's basket, and stoop-

ing to stroke his silky head. "Mr. Thorpe gave her up into my hands, not very willingly."

"Who is Mr. Thorpe? I don't quite understand about him. First he was young, and now he seems to be old," said Lady Anne.

"There are two, an uncle and nephew," Lisa explained, smiling. "We have always known them both. The uncle is a very learned man, a fellow of St. Lucy's College. Will—the nephew—was a great favourite of papa's. They have both been as kind as possible."

"He looks like an ingenuous fellow—the young Thorpe," said Mr. Corbet.

"He is everything that is good," said Lisa.

Lady Anne began asking questions about her journey, looking at her with an anxious kindness which touched Lisa's heart.

Colonel Dalbiac had often laughed at his sister-in-law, calling her a fidgetty, narrow-minded fine lady, but it seemed to Lisa as if there was real goodness behind those gentle brown eyes. She thought her aunt was not at all like her mother, whom she remembered worn and haggard, though a much younger woman. But Lady Elizabeth, with her agreeable soldier husband, had had troubles which no one knew, while Lady Anne's life, with sorrows of the kind which pass away, had been a calm succession of evening parties, morning visits, drives in her father's coach, changes of fashion, well-trained lap-dogs, and a state of health, which, without any great pain, saved her from extra gaiety or troublesome exertion of any kind. She had plenty of amusement: she read the *Times*, the *Morning Post*, the reviews, and all the respectable novels: she knew everybody who was worth knowing, and took an

affectionate interest in the affairs of her friends. The arrival of this orphan niece brought her first real responsibility. No wonder that she was anxious and restless. So was Mr. Corbet for her; and it was partly to please her, and partly to satisfy his own curiosity, that he offered to meet the young lady and bring her to St. George's.

Presently Lady Anne took Lisa to her room, a white nest in a dark oak setting, and came back alone, with tears in her eyes, to Mr. Corbet and the fire. She sat down silently, shading her face with a screen.

"Well, what have I brought you?" he said, in his deep pleasant voice.

"Elizabeth's child—so like her," said Lady Anne, softly. "Those sad eyes, and that strange gracefulness. But she was never quite so remarkable. How very peculiar! Don't you think so?"

"Yes. I don't know what I think, yet," said Mr. Corbet. "She is not a person to be understood at once, either in looks or in mind. Now, I am like you, and say 'remarkable.' Next week I may say 'beautiful.'"

"Oh, never. Certainly not beautiful," said Lady Anne. "There is a want of softness, and she is so thin, poor girl. I daresay she has gone through a great deal with that poor father of hers. Still she spoke just now as if she cared for him."

"I daresay he behaved well to her. He was probably proud of her. And I don't know what society she may have lived in, but at present I have seen no trace of any but the best."

"I shall find out all about that," said Lady Anne,

"I am very glad you admire her. I have great faith in your judgment."

"Yes, I certainly do," said Mr. Corbet, thoughtfully. "The strangest thing is, that I have either dreamt of her, or seen her before. I felt when I saw her at Charing Cross that the face was not new to me. Possibly I may have passed her in the street, when I was in Paris the other day. You see it is not an appearance to be forgotten."

Lady Anne smiled, but she had great misgivings. The charge of a girl of Lisa's age, peculiar in herself, and having lived perhaps among queer people, seemed to her something very tremendous. Had Lisa been ugly and stupid, the charge would have been more tiresome, but the responsibility less great. She was cheered, however, by Spenser's approval. His admiration was worth having, and inspired her at once with an idea.

She soon went away to dress for dinner, leaving him where he was, and Lisa, presently coming back into the room, found him sitting quietly in the same place. He got up and brought her a chair, and then stood talking to her in the firelight. Once, looking up, she caught his eyes fixed upon her with a grave considerate admiration. The small head with its waving hair, the graceful lines, the harmoniousness of every look and movement, which, joined with the lovely voice and eyes, had taken Will's heart captive, were not likely to fail of their effect on other human beings, though much more important and experienced.

"I have seen you before," said Lisa, suddenly.

"And I have seen *you* before—but I thought perhaps it was in a dream."

"No; I can tell you where it was. At the door of a jeweller's shop in the Rue du Bac, last September."

"I am sure you are right," said Mr. Corbet, rather puzzled by a little excitement in her manner, and a sudden wistful curiosity in the eyes that were looking at him. "Gérard, certainly. A quaint little shop, but I was recommended to go there, and I got what I wanted. He has a great many pretty things locked up. Do you know the shop well?"

"No; I have only been in it that once," said Lisa.

"I bought a diamond ring there—one of the prettiest I ever saw. Not a modern ring. I suppose he had picked it up somewhere. I have a fancy for old-fashioned jewellery."

"It is very strange—there are such coincidences in the world," said Lisa.

"Yes?" a little doubtfully.

"That I should have met you at the door there, without knowing who you were. And another odd thing that I cannot tell you now," said Lisa.

He looked at her wonderingly, and supposed that she was in some way alluding to her father. Perhaps some of Lady Elizabeth's fine old jewellery had been sold to Gérard, he thought, hovering near the truth.

"You have been studying painting, have you not?" he said presently.

"Yes. I have been working at the Louvre, and at home too. I care for nothing so much," said Lisa. "Some day I hope to be able to paint."

"I used to draw a little," said Mr. Corbet. "It is a charming amusement. I know the Louvre well."

"To me it is something more than amusement," said Lisa, smiling. "I wonder if you care for my special friends in the Louvre."

A cultivated Englishman with a real knowledge of art was a new experience to her. She was not long in discovering that he knew more about the best pictures and their painters than she did herself. They soon got to Italian and northern galleries; he knew them all, and when Lady Anne came into the room her niece was meekly asking questions, and Spenser was talking about Memling and Van Eyck as if he had lived in their ateliers. Lady Anne came gently up to the fire, and as Lisa looked round, laid a soft white hand caressingly on her hair.

"So you and Spenser have already found a mutual interest," she said.

"Mr. Corbet is teaching me a great deal," said Lisa.

CHAPTER VIII.

LISA'S REFUGE.

"Only,—as fresh young beauty gleams
From coffee-coloured laces,—
So peeped from its old-fashioned dreams
The fresher modern traces."

AUSTIN DOBSON.

LISA thought that if peace was to be found anywhere on earth, it certainly was at St. George's Palace. A wonderful change indeed from her home up many stairs in a Paris street, from her consultations with Martine, her walks to the Louvre, her steady painting, her sympathy with poorer and more struggling artists than herself. A rest from anxiety, too, for certainly no sordid cares could show themselves where Lady Anne was. Everybody seemed to agree with Mr. Corbet that she was too delightful to be troubled. The people who came to call upon her during the first day or two that her niece was there seemed to tell her nothing but what was agreeable. Lisa thought with a touch of amusement, that she had never seen such pleasant people before. She liked them all, more or less, but nobody made such an impression upon her as Mr. Corbet had done; and he did not at once come again.

She wandered through the picture-galleries, and made friends with quaint Holbeins and stately Vandycks; she sat in one of Lady Anne's great soft armchairs, and lost herself in a novel, from which she was

recalled by the clock in the quadrangle chiming the hour. Lady Anne came into the room, and Lisa rose from her chair and laid the book down. It was four o'clock, and already almost dusk. Lady Anne did not go to her sofa, but sat down by the fire, and Lisa came and stood beside her.

"The English climate affects me very oddly," she said. "I don't feel as if I could do anything. I hope my energies will come back, or you will think me very idle."

"My dear child, it is only natural that you should be idle," said Lady Anne. "It is the reaction from all you have gone through. It is much better than being restless."

"I don't like it," said Lisa. "But it is true, I feel inclined to do nothing but look about me."

"Look about you, then. All this is a new experience to you. I am very thankful that you find it a peaceful one."

"I feel inclined to spend most of my time looking at you," said Lisa smiling. "Since I grew up, I have never lived with an English lady. You are quite a study to me."

"That ought to make me very nervous," said Lady Anne. "I am not at all worthy of being studied. But I am very glad, dear, to have you here at last. I always felt that we ought to know each other. Now we shall be friends for the rest of our lives."

Something made Lisa kneel down suddenly, and give herself up to a long embrace. Then she remained sitting quite in child-like fashion on the hearthrug, while her aunt stroked her hair.

Lady Anne was fast getting over the little nervous

shyness, which, woman of the world as she was, she had felt at first with Lisa. Still she found it impossible to talk away on the pleasant nothings that generally interested her. Perhaps this feeling arose from Lisa's recent sorrow, but more probably from something in her character which always appealed to the real deepest self of the people who were with her. Lady Anne was obliged to go against her ordinary self, whose bent was to avoid everything sad or earnest.

As Lisa sat there beside her, the long-separated relations at last alone together, she suddenly began telling her about her mother's young days, and talked gently on, with all kinds of recollections, to which the younger woman listened with a curious comparison running on in her mind all the time. The earl's daughter, with her careful education, her career as a London beauty, her bright accomplishments, her wonderful hard-heartedness, which dismissed one admirer after another, till at last, when no longer very young, she took a sudden fancy to handsome Captain Dalbiac, and insisted on marrying him. Lady Anne was far too well-bred and kind-hearted to breathe a word against him to his daughter, but she could not help speaking a little sadly of her sister.

"I suppose," she said, "the brightest morning is often the soonest clouded over. Dear Elizabeth! She and I were quite inseparable. Who would have thought that her child could have grown up so entirely apart from me!"

"I wonder what my mother would have thought of my life," said Lisa. "It has been different enough from hers, but often very happy."

"I wish you would tell me something about it, dear Lisa. You have no idea how little I know of it."

So Lisa began, and told her story, and Lady Anne felt a little consternation as she listened.

For the last ten or twelve years it had been a wandering life, in Italy, Germany, and France, and the aunt could make out nothing of regular education, of society, of respectability even. Colonel Dalbiac was even worse than she thought. When Lisa spoke of her friends in Paris, they turned out to be professional artists of a poor and small kind. Not a single "de," not an inhabitant of any étage lower than deuxième, was to be found in the list of her acquaintance.

"And you had no English friends?"

"None. Papa knew more people than I did, but he said I should not care for them."

"My dear child," said Lady Anne, forgetting herself, "where did you get your air, and your manners?"

"Have I any manners?" said Lisa, smiling. "Well —abroad, you know, we are all polite. And papa would not have liked me to grow up stupid and awkward."

"You have inherited it all," said Lady Anne, nodding. "How very thankful I am, that left to yourself, as you must have been, you have not been led into marrying anybody—one of those amiable artists, for instance."

Lisa paused a moment. "No, I think I could never have done that," she said.

"Of course not. I was quite in fun, dear," said Lady Anne.

"Not because of the profession," said Lisa. "There was one—but he was a great deal older, and quite

different, and certainly did not dream of such a thing, or he could not have been my best friend, as he was. But I could not care for any one who was not very much above me in every way. I have an ideal who is to win all his battles and be successful in whatever he takes up," she said, looking up and laughing a little. "Do you think that is unnatural?"

"Very fine, on the contrary," said Lady Anne. "I quite agree with you. I like a man to distinguish himself. One feels it an honour to be valued highest by a man whom all the world values—or even one's own corner of it—because he has done something worth doing. I have quite your feeling about it."

Lisa gazed into the fire. She seemed to see Will's eyes, looking at her reproachfully, asking her not to forget the faint hope she had given him. Lady Anne presently began to talk about her cousin Spenser Corbet.

"That is a successful man," she said. "And he deserves his success, for he worked hard for it. Several people have told me that we have no young politician who is more thought of. He is certain to have a good post, when his party comes into power again. You see, besides being so very clever, he is perfectly sensible and right-minded. Spenser is a great favourite of mine."

"He is quite devoted to you," said Lisa.

"That is so amiable of him. I often wonder at all his goodness and attention. I suppose some day he will marry, but even then I hope I shall not lose him. He has promised to consult me. But he has never yet met with his ideal lady. He has an ideal, I think, as you have."

Spenser Corbet was a very favourite subject with Lady Anne. Everything she said about him seemed more strongly to mark him out as distinguished from other men—clever, brave, wise, hard-working, affectionate, generous. Lisa listened, and compared him with Will—she could not help it. Lady Anne wondered a little at her thoughtful silence. Presently she paused at the end of some anecdotes of Spencer's childhood, and said suddenly, "Would you dislike playing to me, Lisa? You do play, I think."

"Yes, but not much. I used to accompany M. Simonet's violin," said Lisa, getting up. "My good artist friend that I told you of. Sometimes we used to play together for hours. But I have not been taught much. I cannot play like an English girl."

"Anything you do will delight me, dear child," said Lady Anne, ignoring M. Simonet and his violin.

The piano stood a little way off, near the door. She turned round in her chair and watched her niece as she sat down and laid her fingers on the keys. She had ear and taste enough to enjoy the wild sweet melancholy of the Beethoven music that Lisa played, and yet it filled her with a vague uneasines. Perhaps she suspected that it took the player back with too vivid a sense to the wandering life that she had left behind her, and if she thought so she was not far wrong. That music carried thought back to the little salon full of sunset light, the free shelter of a free life, and at that moment, as it happened, reminded Lisa strongly of Will's first evening there. She and M. Simonet had played this very air as he sat listening and wondering at this new revelation of a grown-up artist Lisa. Poor Will! how well she remembered his grave wistful face.

as he came and stood beside her, and asked for an English song.

Lisa forgot her aunt, and played on to herself and Will in the twilight for half-an-hour or more, till the gentle clatter of tea-things coming in reminded her that she was in England. It roused Lady Anne too, who had been almost sent to sleep by the strange dreamy music, and sat softly blinking her brown eyes in the firelight.

"You play charmingly, dear," she said, as Lisa came forward. "Your music is real. Spenser will be delighted with it. You must play to him."

"Is Mr. Corbet musical?" said Lisa.

"Yes, indeed. He has a fine bass voice. We must make him sing to us. Thank you: do you mind pouring out tea?"

"Aunt Anne," said Lisa presently, putting into words an idea which had come to her as she played, "I believe Mr. Corbet knows Miss Kenneth of N—— Square. Do you know her?"

"No, I don't. Our old friend Lady Mansell took Spenser to call upon her. She thinks her very interesting, and I believe he did too. She certainly must be very good. She takes in starving children," said Lady Anne, raising her eyebrows slightly, and looking at Lisa. "Spenser tells me he does not like those amateur charities, and I have no doubt he is right. Between ourselves, I rather imagine Miss Kenneth is one of those people with a mission. There are a great many of them in England, and I am not sure that they all do good. But dear Lady Mansell is so kind-hearted. If a thing is called charity, she never thinks about the wisdom of it."

"I have heard about Miss Kenneth from another source," said Lisa. "My friend Will Thorpe says her goodness is something quite wonderful. And he told me a romantic story about her."

"May I hear it? I delight in romantic stories," said Lady Anne.

"It is no secret, I think," said Lisa. "Will's mother, Mrs. Thorpe—you may have heard of her long ago—was engaged to Sir Thomas Kenneth, this Miss Kenneth's brother, but was so naughty as to run away with Captain Thorpe the night before her wedding-day. The romance is that Mr. Lennard, Mrs. Thorpe's brother, had been engaged to Miss Kenneth. When his sister behaved in this way to Sir Thomas, he wrote at once to give up his engagement. So there has been a quarrel ever since between these two families, whose estates join each other. Sir Thomas Kenneth married after a time. His wife is dead now, and he is left with one daughter. Mr. Lennard has never married, and is the strangest old bachelor possible. Will lives with him, and he has made him his heir. And as to Will, he is perfectly friendly with the Kenneths, and goes to their house constantly, without any objection from his uncle."

"Perhaps the alliance will come to pass after all," said Lady Anne. "Does Will like the young Miss Kenneth?"

"I don't know," said Lisa, suddenly finding the fire too hot, and taking up a book to screen herself. "No—yes, rather, I think. It would be a very good thing for him." She paused, and then went on rather hurriedly: "I should very much like to know Miss Kenneth, if you have no objection. Her niece is staying

with her now. Perhaps Lady Mansell would take me to call."

"We will ask her," said Lady Anne. "Yes, it will amuse you to see them, as your friend is likely to be connected with them. And what is he like? Spenser seemed to be pleased with him."

"It is difficult for me to tell you what he is like," said Lisa, in an odd voice. "He is about my age—fair and good-looking. We have always been very great friends."

"I hope any old friends of yours—he, for instance, or his uncle Mr. Thorpe, know that I should be glad to see them, if they like to call upon you here," said Lady Anne, for once Jesuitical. A suspicion had crossed her mind, and she felt that she must absolutely get at the truth.

"Thank you: you are very kind," said Lisa. "But I almost think he had better not come here."

"Ah! Very well, dear, you know best," said her aunt gently.

"Poor fellow! no wonder!" she thought to herself, as she glanced covertly at Lisa in the firelight. So this was a disappointed lover, who was still to be a friend, in the manner of fiction, and was to be consoled with the younger Miss Kenneth.

Lady Anne was of opinion that this substitute would have to be very charming, if she was really to take Lisa's place. For her it was quite plain that there was only one person good enough. He was already attracted, and Lady Anne, who till now had been quite innocent of match-making, resolved that it was her plain duty to throw these two together as much as possible. Nothing could happen more agreeable to herself, or more fortunate for them.

CHAPTER IX.

JULIA.

"No; not to be so odd, and from all fashions
As Beatrice is, cannot be commendable;
But who dare tell her so?"

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

JULIA KENNETH, after spending several weeks with her aunt, was preparing to return home. Sir Thomas wrote affectionately and impatiently, and told her that everything went wrong without her, a statement at which Julia laughed scornfully, but she wrote back to him and fixed her day. Clementina Perrott wrote at the same time to her relations at the Priory, telling them that Miss Kenneth had asked her to stay longer, and that she would like it of all things. Miss Kenneth was so wonderfully kind, and she was so fond of the children, and London was such a delightful place.

"London in November!" said Mr. Perrott contemptuously. "She had better come home."

"I don't agree with you, Mr. Perrott," said his wife. "The more Tiny is away from this place, and from that Matthew, the better for her."

Alfred took his mother's side, and remarked besides, that as Miss Kenneth had taken a fancy to Tiny, she might as well keep her as long as she liked. Lotty was very grumpy, and professed not to care whether Tiny came home or stayed away. So the desired permission was sent in a letter from Afred, who

prided himself on his thick paper and bold hand-writing, and thought perhaps this specimen might come under the eyes of Julia, to whom he sent his kind regards.

Julia was in rather a grim temper on her last day in London, which she spent shopping with her maid and Tiny. Among other things she bought half-a-dozen pair of gloves for her father, explaining to Tiny that she had lost a bet.

"What was it?" said Tiny, innocently.

"Do you want to know? Well, I don't mind telling you. I betted Papa those gloves that Mr. Thorpe would bring a wife back with him to Mallam. He has not, you see. So my bet is lost, and the governor is set up in gloves for the present."

"Oh!" said Tiny, rather shocked. "Did you think they would be married in Paris? But that was not very likely, was it?"

"Most unlikely," said Julia, laughing. "I am rather sorry to go back without seeing the wonder. I wish I had gone to St. George's Palace, and hovered about on the chance. It is too late now. One is not half strong-minded enough."

When they got back to N—— Square, a carriage was at the door and going upstairs, they found some visitors in the drawing-room. Esther looked a little excited, which was not generally the case when old Lady Mansell called. There was she, nearest the door, in a low chair by the fireplace. By the table sat Mr. Corbet, who, just as the two girls came in, was speaking with a good deal of animation to a young lady in black, a little farther off.

"Tiny, we are in luck!" whispered Julia, at the door.

"Oh, there she is!" was Tiny's rapturous answer.

Lady Mansell, wrapped up in a velvet cloak and a Shetland veil, with gloves much too large for her, was full of kindly rejoicing at their appearance. Tiny shook hands silently with her and Mr. Corbet, and then Esther laid her hand on her shoulder.

"Miss Dalbiac, I think you know this friend of mine."

"Indeed I do," said Lisa, shaking hands with Tiny, and instantly beginning to inquire for her people at home.

Tiny, shy as of old, did not enlarge upon them much. Lisa looked up from the grave little face, and met a pair of strong bright black eyes fixed upon her, with a deep interest and curiosity which startled her, and brought a faint colour to her cheeks.

"Let me introduce my niece," said Esther Kenneth.

Lisa recovered herself at once, and put out her hand with a smile. "I have heard of you," she said to Julia.

"Have you? Where?" with a dash of fierceness which made both Mr. Corbet and Tiny look up in amazement.

"In Paris, where I have been living. From an acquaintance of yours, Mr. Thorpe," answered Lisa, with her usual gentleness.

"Oh—yes," said Julia. "He entertains us all very much at Mallam and Selbridge. He has a notion of putting the world right."

"Mr. Thorpe! Has he indeed? I had no idea of that," exclaimed Mr. Corbet.

"Not in your way, by legislating," said Julia, turning towards him. "By making separate people better and happier."

"Ah, Miss Kenneth, that is a very slow way," he said, smiling.

"And a very difficult way too," answered Julia. "You never tried it, I suppose. Theories are much pleasanter. Don't you admire Mr. Thorpe's work?" turning to Lisa.

"Yes, certainly. But I have not seen it, you know, and you have."

"It is all the more credit to him, as that extraordinary uncle of his might throw him over at any moment," said Julia in a low voice, glancing at her aunt. "However, he has made friends down in that country who will last, whatever happens."

"I am very glad of it," said Lisa calmly. "I am sure he deserves them."

She was obliged to confess to herself that she had seldom felt more repelled than by Julia's rough antagonistic manner. At the same time her conviction was so very strong that this girl had already something more than a friendly feeling for Will, that she wished with all her heart to like her. It was so plain that there could not be a better arrangement for him. As to Julia, the very roughest side of her nature seemed to be set on end by the quiet elegant object of Will's devotion, who looked at her with a strange considering smile, and spoke of him and his doings without the faintest shadow of agitation. Mr. Corbet, understanding nothing of the thoughts in these two ladies' minds, looked from one to the other in an amused wonder, and compared them, not much to Julia's advantage.

These three found themselves left alone in the room. Lady Mansell begged to see the dear children, and Esther and Tiny took her away upstairs. After a minute Tiny glided in again, and came up to Mr. Corbet, "Oh, please, Miss Kenneth very much wants you to see the children. They are at their tea. Would you come now?"

"With great pleasure," said Mr. Corbet. "Miss Kenneth is bent on converting me. But I quite believe that she gives them more butter and more sugar than the institutions do." He glanced once more at Lisa, "Are you coming?"

"Stay here and talk to me, Miss Dalbiac," said Julia, half entreatingly. "You don't care about the children. I have wished so much to see you, and I am going home to-morrow."

So Lisa stayed, and Mr. Corbet left the room with Tiny.

"I hope Mr. Thorpe is as grateful as he ought to be for your kindness," said Lisa, finding that her companion did not speak at once.

"What does it matter to you?" was Julia's response.

Lisa raised her eyebrows slightly, and clasped her hands together.

"I am afraid I don't quite understand you," she said, looking straight at Julia. "What does it matter to me? I have known Mr. Thorpe all my life, and surely it is not very strange that I should take an interest in him."

"Indeed it would be strange if you did not. But you have been an utter puzzle to me ever since I first heard of you, and since I saw your face in that pic-

ture. He thinks of you a great deal more than you do of him," said Julia, in a low angry voice. "We all at home know your name, and wonder at you. Is it not a wonder, that heartless people should draw what is best in the world to themselves, and keep it without caring for it? But I suppose it is the old story."

This was indeed tragical. Lisa bit her lips, and flushed crimson, feeling angry with everybody, and especially with Will, who had evidently been using her name in a manner that she had never contemplated. Julia had the gratification of seeing this fairy-tale princess look thoroughly human at last. She stared at her defiantly, watching the effect of her words. At first Lisa was too much disturbed to speak.

"Miss Kenneth," she said at last very quietly, "I do not know what concern you have with Mr. Thorpe's affairs or mine. I will tell you this—that I never gave him the right to make my name the talk of his neighbourhood. As for my being heartless—my character is of course nothing to you—but I think he might have known"——

"Are you blaming him?" said Julia, for Lisa broke off, her voice failing. "You need not, I assure you. He sets you up as something wonderful. He never called you heartless. It is only his friends who venture to be surprised at the way in which you treat him."

"It is his own doing," said Lisa.

She stopped, for it seemed too undignified and ridiculous to be justifying herself to this rude girl, whom she felt sure that Will could never like. She surprised Julia by beginning suddenly to laugh a little.

"What is all this about?" she said. "What do you want to know? Why should I be responsible to you? We will say no more about it, if you please."

She got up, walked across to the table, and took up a book that was lying there. Julia began to feel rather miserable, as she looked at the tall slight figure and the downcast face, from which the colour had fled as suddenly as it came. The lady-like and honourable nature which lay perdue beneath Miss Kenneth's thorny exterior began to assert itself. Still she could not make up her mind what to say or do, till sounds of people returning were heard on the stairs. She got up and went forward to Lisa.

"I beg your pardon," she said, in a low voice. "I have behaved odiously. Will you forgive me?"

Lisa turned round, smiling, and gave Julia her hand.

"Forgive me, too, if I have vexed you," she said. "If you were in my place, I think you would not always find it easy to know what was right."

Julia looked hard at her, and would have said something, but the others came back into the room.

Then Esther began to talk to Lisa, who found it a wonderful relief to be transferred from the ferocious niece to the soft-eyed gentle aunt, who talked to her about Lady Anne and the old palace, and about her painting, and such calmly pleasant subjects, with a cleverness and refinement of which Lisa was very well aware. This went on till Lady Mansell found that it was time to go.

Afterwards Julia sat crouching by the fire, with her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands. Her aunt, rather puzzled and distressed, glanced from her

to Tiny, who shook her head, and then said gently, "Did Miss Dalbiac come up to your expectations? I must confess that she did to mine. I was quite struck with her."

"Oh, isn't she lovely, Miss Kenneth!" murmured Tiny.

"I'll tell you what, Aunt Esther," grumbled Julia, through her fingers, "she may be as lovely as you and Tiny please, but she does not care for him. She likes that Mr. Corbet of yours much better. And he likes her."

"Do you think so?" said Esther gravely.

"I am very stupid, I know, but I am not quite blind. It would be much better—a very good thing for them both. Why does she keep him hanging on, when she means to have nothing to say to him in the end? I know she does not care for him. I call it detestable. I was very rude to her, do you know. I told her as much."

"Did you really, Julia?"

"Yes. I told her she was heartless. She minded a little, and I was rather sorry afterwards, for of course the thing is no business of mine."

"No," said Esther quietly. "You must have surprised her very much."

"I begged her pardon, and I could do no more. Oh dear! there is so much waste in the world," groaned Julia.

"Then don't add any more to it, my dear girl," said her aunt.

It was with a very sad face that she stood by Julia, looking down at her, and feeling helpless to do any good. Tiny had retired awestruck to the window, and

now, with the tact which belonged to her, stole round and crept out of the door.

For a few minutes the aunt and niece remained quite still. Then, perhaps for the first time since Julia was a child, Esther bent down over her, laid her arm round her neck, and pressed her face against her own, stroking back the obstinate curls from her forehead with soft tender fingers. Julia seized the kind hand and rather roughly kissed it.

"Yes; I know I am a fool," she said. "You ought to be furious with me, instead of being kind like this. I can tell you I am furious with myself."

"There is only one thing I want to say," said Esther. "Be brave, if you can't be happy. Respect yourself."

"Don't be afraid, Aunt Esther. I'm better now. If I ever see her again, I will try and behave like a Christian. But somehow she was too much for me, and I could not help it."

CHAPTER X.

SPENSER CORBET.

"For the rest, accomplished, upright,—ay, and standing by his order
With a bearing not ungraceful; fond of art and letters too;
Just a good man made a proud man,—as the sandy rocks that border
A wild coast, by circumstances, in a regnant ebb and flow."

E. B. BROWNING.

LISA said nothing to any one about the painful little scene with Julia Kenneth. It had vexed and saddened her on Will's account, as well as her own. The knowledge that he had been talking about her at Mallam was disagreeable, neither was it pleasant to have the character of a heartless flirt, which she did not think that she deserved. She had an idea of writing to Will, and telling him once for all that he must give up all thoughts of her, but she could not bring herself to do that. She felt that she must now keep his answer for him till the end of the year, as she had promised, foolishly perhaps. She sometimes thought to herself that there were few things more troublesome to a woman than a young, devoted, enthusiastic lover, whose affection she could neither get rid of nor return.

Yet after the first weeks she felt lonely and restless even with kind, gentle, cultivated Lady Anne and her agreeable neighbours, with the grand old palace, its pictures and its recollections, with the autumn sun shining on the bricks, the pigeons flying round the clock-tower, and cooing about the chimney-stacks; with

Mr. Corbet's visits, which brought an element of manly strength and brightness into the warm quiet drawing-room, and roused even Puff to a faint interest in outward things. It was all peaceful and pleasant, but when Lisa got over her first exhaustion of mind and body, it seemed to her a kind of limbo, an existence without a future. Lady Anne in her placidity seemed perfectly satisfied; any change would have been dreadful to her. She could not see the yearnings in her niece's mind for a life that could be lived and that led to something. She only admired Lisa's gentleness, wondered how she could ever have been afraid of having her, came to her with little caresses when she looked particularly tired or sad, told all her friends what a happiness she was to her.

The autumn was unusually mild. Even in the beginning of December there was hardly any frost, and leaves still lingered on many of the trees. Lisa went wandering about alone in the Palace gardens, with a black and white plaid shawl tied round her. Sometimes she came to the gates and looked out into the road bordered by trees which led into the village of St. George's, and afterwards along near the river.

It was between three and four o'clock, and there was a beautiful light on everything. The grass in the meadows, and by the side of the road, was an almost dazzling green. The trees, orange and faint yellow, shone like flame against a clear cold blue sky from which thin clouds were melting away into the white brightness of the sinking sun. Lisa felt that afternoon as if the Palace was a prison from which she must escape. She opened the old iron gate, with its gilded flourishes, closed it again, and walked along the broad

path towards the red houses of the village, with her back to the western sky.

In the village, under the beech avenue which sheltered the quaint gabled house-fronts, there was not much life stirring; but there were people with earnest careworn faces going in and out of the few quiet shops; there were mothers, with babies in their arms, standing at the doors, looking out into the bright evening; there was a carrier's cart stopping here and there as it went by to London. Lisa walked on slowly, looking with interest at these things, and half wishing, in her restlessness, that she could change places with any of these people who had work to do and real lives to live.

At the end of the village she passed the little railway station. A train from London had just come in, and a few people with baskets and bags were hurrying out. Among these came a gentleman, with a servant carrying a portfolio. He glanced up and down the road, and saw a slight figure in a black gown and a shawl gracefully arranged round her shoulders, leaving the village behind her and going towards the river that glittered through the trees, a few hundred yards farther on. He hesitated a moment, but there was no mistaking Lisa's walk, and he turned hurriedly to his man. "Go on to the Palace and keep the portfolio till I come. I am going to join Miss Dalbiac."

"Very well, sir," said the man.

It may seem a strange assertion, but even Under Secretaries have not always perfectly discreet servants, and this man, as he walked away in the opposite direction to his master, could not help glancing over his shoulder to watch him as he overtook the young

lady. There was not much to be seen. Mr. Corbet came up with Miss Dalbiac directly, and spoke to her. She turned round without even a start, and gave him her hand, smiling. Then they walked on slowly together under the avenue.

"How do you come to be out of bounds?" said Mr. Corbet, half earnestly.

"Because I cannot possibly stay in bounds," she answered. "Could you look at one view for ever? I know every corner in the garden. When I came to the gate, I was obliged to open it. And then the village was too attractive."

"The village! I never saw it in that light before."

"Ah! you don't know. You can run about as you please, and work as hard as you please. But you blame me if I want anything more than needlework and novel reading. I am sure all Englishwomen don't lead such lives."

"You think your aunt's life useless, then?"

Lisa did not answer.

"I may take silence for assent? I can only tell you that a year ago, when I was working very hard, and sometimes felt as if the strain was almost too much, a visit to her was the one thing that kept me going. Her atmosphere of perfect peace was really like a corner of paradise," he said, smiling.

"I daresay I should think so too, if I was working hard," said Lisa. "I did think so at first, when the only thing I wanted was to stop living for a little while. But now I want to live again. Don't tell her so; it would only distress her. I did not mean to tell any one, till I really saw my way to doing something."

"Don't regret telling me," said Mr. Corbet. "We

are cousins. I wish you would remember that. I think I have a right to know all about you."

"Thank you. You are very kind. But it is not much of a relationship."

"Just enough, and not too much. I must bring the pedigree, and show you exactly how it is. Take my word for it; it is near enough for a very pleasant friendship." He was going to add something else, but checked himself, hesitated, and ended by saying, "If you will think so, I shall be very happy."

Lisa was pleased, for she had a very high opinion of Mr. Corbet. There was something to be depended on in his grave decided manner. When he spoke of friendship, there was real meaning in the word; it carried a promise of faithful and ready help in difficulties, of reasonable sympathy in troubles, besides the pleasant easy intercourse that had already begun.

They walked down to the river, and along the towing-path, for a little way. Old Thames swept past them, his broad face shining with the afternoon light. Here and there a great tree had carpeted the path with leaves. The passing boats, the houses and trees on the opposite bank, began to glimmer softly through a faint white mist.

"It is too cold for you here," said Mr. Corbet. "We must turn back," and Lisa at once submitted.

She had been talking to him, while he listened gravely and attentively, and had told him how bent she was on going on with her painting.

"I must be an artist, you know," she said. "I care for nothing else. Don't think me unreasonable or ungrateful, but I cannot live as I do now. It will kill me in time."

"And don't think me unsympathetic if I am very sorry to hear you say so. We can't help rejoicing at your rescue from that artist life. It is not fit for you."

"Why should not I have my work and do it, as well as Miss Kenneth?"

"You and Miss Kenneth are very different people," he said, smiling. "Nobody would think of hindering her from doing whatever she pleased—setting off, for instance, on an expedition to the centre of the slave trade, or to visit the infant schools in Cairo. But your friends would have a word to say if you wished to investigate the paintings in the Etruscan tombs, or to set up by yourself in a London studio."

"Both would be equally impossible, would they?" said Lisa.

"I think so."

"Ah, do you know what the meaning of it all is? I have lived in Bohemia, and I am not fit for any other country."

"Don't say that," said Mr. Corbet, with a slight shudder. "You know nothing about Bohemia. Do believe me that in English society we value nothing so much as ladies like you—only too charming, if they recognise their own position, and are contented to stay in it."

"You are not going to flatter me into content," said Lisa, shaking her head.

"I would not offend you by trying. I am only telling you the truth, as a cousin and a friend."

"It is no use. I must paint. What can I do, if I may not set up for myself? If you are my friend, you will tell me," she said, raising her eyes with a look of half insistance, half entreaty.

He looked at her for a moment, and answered, smiling, "It wants thinking about. Nobody could wish to prevent you from exercising your charming talent. But there are ways of doing things."

"Then find a way for me."

"I will. I must talk to Lady Anne. Can you wonder, if she wishes to keep her newly-found treasure wrapped up in cotton wool? I don't even think, do you know, that she would like you to walk about here alone."

"Oh!" said Lisa, and she laughed. "But I am surely old enough to take care of myself."

"That is not exactly the question," said Mr. Corbet. "But I daresay you have had enough of the proprieties. I have brought down something to show you, some autotypes of well-known pictures. I can't help encouraging and discouraging at the same time, you see."

"Ah, you are like somebody I read of once. You love art kindly, but the world reverentially."

"It may be that," said Mr. Corbet. "But the world has been very good to me, and I owe it some observance."

"I don't feel myself in debt to it at all," said Lisa. "Thank you very much for bringing the autotypes. I shall enjoy looking at them."

Lady Anne had seldom been better pleased than when the two people she loved best in the world came in together, Lisa looking brighter than she had done since she came to St. George's. The portfolio was sent for, and the autotypes were laid out on the drawing-room table. Lisa's admiration quite satisfied Mr. Corbet, who had spent hours in choosing them. There

were twelve of them, about the same size, from the best pictures in the National Gallery.

"Lady Anne," said Mr. Corbet, "do you think I am nearly enough related to Miss Dalbiac to ask her to accept these?"

"I should say, certainly, my dear Spenser," answered Lady Anne, letting down her eye-glass.

"Then will you give me the pleasure of having chosen them for you?" he said to Lisa.

A feeling of unwillingness came over her, but she conquered it instantly, knowing that it was impossible to refuse.

"Thank you. I will indeed," she said. "It is most cousinly of you. They are beautiful. But as we are so nearly related, I think I should like you to call me by my name."

The colour rose suddenly in Mr. Corbet's dark face as he bent over the table.

"The reward is more than I deserve," he said after a moment, looking up and smiling. "Thank you, Lisa. You have given me a great privilege."

Lady Anne was delighted. Such little scenes as this always suited her, and how much more when she was so deeply interested in the actors! She had always known how charming Spenser could be when he forgot his public self, and thought of nothing but making an hour pass pleasantly for her. But he was generally nothing of a ladies' man, and these attentions and pretty speeches to a young woman like Lisa were quite new developments.

She looked at him curiously and affectionately, when after a time Lisa left the room, and he sat down opposite to her, in his usual arm-chair beside Puff's

corner. He stared thoughtfully at the fire, and did not speak at once.

"You are bringing me into trouble," he said presently. "Don't you remember my telling you once that I did not mean to marry till I was forty?"

"Yes, my dear, quite well," said Lady Anne. "Have you changed your mind?"

"What is a fellow to do! And you thought it such a wise notion, and quoted one man after another who had spoilt his prospects by marrying too soon. And then, ma'am, you have a niece from Paris, the most captivating person, except yourself, in England,—let one come here just as usual, and expect one to remain unscorched. I have tried to stay away"——

"Have you, really! Oh, Spenser, be serious. Do you mean what you are saying? You must know that nothing could make me happier. You are not so very young. Forty is absurdly late. I am sure I never told you to wait so long as that."

Mr. Corbet smiled. "I am quite serious," he said. "I told you this as an excuse for myself,—because I want to interfere about her a little. She is very anxious to get back to her painting. She feels restless and unsettled; this is such an unaccustomed life to her. And this afternoon I found her wandering at the other end of the village."

"Poor girl! But what am I to do?" said Lady Anne, with tears in her eyes. "She cannot possibly paint here."

"I want you to let me find some place where she can paint. And if I may say so, I think she ought to have a maid of her own. She will not be happy

without a certain amount of liberty, and a person of her appearance cannot go about alone."

"Certainly not. I quite agree with you," said Lady Anne. "And you really are attached to her! I have been hoping, but I did not know. Well—she thinks a good deal of her old life, but I don't fancy you will find any one in your way."

"Those French artists! She has better taste," said Mr. Corbet. "With your encouragement, I don't feel much fear of them."

"Nor do I, of the artists," said Lady Anne. "I had a little suspicion, at one time, about that young Mr. Thorpe—but I don't think so now."

"No, I think not. They were talking about him at Miss Kenneth's the other day. I saw him, you know. A pleasant-looking boy, with nice curly hair and blue eyes. Miss Kenneth's niece seemed to be rather enthusiastic about him. No danger there. Still, if I really have your consent, and if I am not asking too much, I wish you would feel the way for me a little. I must confess—you may be shocked—but I could not risk a refusal."

"I should be very sorry if you did," said Lady Anne. "You have my consent indeed, and my best wishes."

Lisa did not come back into the room for an hour, and they talked about her all the time.

Then Lady Anne reminded her that her cousin Spenser had never heard her play, and these two new friends of hers sat listening in the firelight, while she played herself back, as she never could help doing, to the little salon in the Paris street, to hard work, perhaps, and anxiety, but also to the freedom that lightens every load.

CHAPTER XI.

A STORY TOLD IN THE PALACE.

"I loved him not; and yet now he is gone
I feel I am alone."

W. S. LANDOR.

LADY ANNE, whose own faithful maid had been with her all her life, had not the faintest idea how to set about finding one for Lisa. She consulted her friend Lady Mansell, who began by telling her several frightful stories about registry offices, and went on to say, in a spirit of active benevolence,—"Now, dear Lady Anne, would you leave it to me? I shall ask quite quietly among my friends. Just at this moment I don't happen to know of any one, but I am always hearing of excellent maids. There's dear Mrs. David Scott, who is so very fanciful, and never keeps a maid more than three months. She parts with them simply for nothing. She hates monotony, poor dear, and finds it so tiresome always to be waited on by the same face and the same voice. Oh, sadly foolish! but she is so amiable, and sweetly pretty, that one can't help loving her."

"As for me," said Lady Anne, "I don't know what I should do if Rachel went away. I should be miserable for the rest of my life. But if you really will undertake this business I shall be more thankful than I can say."

Lisa's maid was not, after all, transferred from Mrs.

David Scott. Lady Mansell began her efforts by calling on Miss Kenneth, whom she considered one of the most discreet of her acquaintance. When she had entered upon her business, Tiny Perrott, blushing and apologetic, begged to put in a word for her mother's old lady's-maid, Mary Kean. She was now living at home, but was anxious to find another situation. Tiny had had a letter from her that very morning.

"She is engaged to the blacksmith," said Tiny, "but they don't mean to be married just yet."

"And why did she leave your mamma?" said Lady Mansell. Tiny blushed and hesitated. Esther, who knew the whole story, came to the rescue.

"For nothing at all serious," she said. "They had a disagreement, of which my friend Clementina was the subject. Kean was rather too soft-hearted and sympathising—was not that it, my dear?"

Tiny nodded.

"Ah, very well. That is quite satisfactory," said Lady Mansell.

So the negotiation went on and prospered. Mrs. Perrott rather grudgingly wrote a character for Mary Kean; she could not deny that she was clever, honest, and good-tempered. Lisa rather liked the idea of having a maid from Mallam. The cheerful Kean accordingly arrived in town on an appointed day, and after visiting her dear Miss Tiny, rejoicing over her improved looks, and pouring out floods of Mallam gossip, journeyed on to St. George's, where she was awed into gravity and quietness by the stately old palace, its cloisters, its ivy and sentries, as well as by the graceful dignified ladies, and grey-haired Rachel with her large cap and soft old black silk gown.

One Saturday, not long after Kean had entered upon her new duties, Lisa came in from a walk and found her aunt lying on her sofa, rather pale and weary, as if she had been entertaining a great many visitors.

"I am glad you are come in, dear," she said. "Who do you think has been to see me? You have just missed her: she has only been gone five minutes."

"Miss Kenneth?" suggested Lisa.

"Yes: how clever of you! She seems very kind, but how odd! I see now what Spenser means when he calls her Charity."

"But what did she come for? Anything besides the pleasure of seeing you?" said Lisa, taking off her hat, and sitting down on a low chair close to her aunt's sofa, with her face on a level with hers.

"She came, most kindly, to talk to me about you."

"What had she to say about me?" said Lisa, looking on the floor and clasping her hands, a usual movement with her, when she was the least nervous or agitated.

"Spenser had been telling her that you wished to go on with your painting, but that there was a little difficulty about arranging it. She came to tell us that she has just taken the house next door to her own. I understood that she wished to take in more children—most good of her, I am sure—but had not room for them. And she will be quite delighted if you will use the drawing-room for a studio, put all your things there, and go there whenever you like. It is really very friendly of her."

"Very," said Lisa. "Dear aunt Anne, I am entirely in your hands. My painting is a great happiness to

me. But you must tell me quite frankly and truly what you think of this plan. If you dislike it in the least, pray say so. Miss Kenneth is very kind, and so is Spenser, but I belong to you."

"Dear child!" said Lady Anne, smiling in answer to Lisa's expressive eyes. "Of course I miss you every hour that you are away. But I must try and keep myself from being selfish, or else I may be sadly punished by and by. I think you had better accept the offer. Now that you have Mary, there is no difficulty in your going backwards and forwards. Only suppose you wait till the days are a little longer."

"Very well," said Lisa, rather thoughtfully.

"I was asking Miss Kenneth something about your old acquaintance, Mr. Thorpe," said Lady Anne after a minute. "She gives a very bright account of him. She says he is working hard to reform all sorts of bad things where he lives. I asked her whether her brother and her niece did not sympathise with him very kindly. She said yes, but no one who knew him could help sympathising with him. I must tell you why I asked. Spenser thought one day that the younger Miss Kenneth spoke of Mr. Thorpe rather enthusiastically. I am such a curious old woman, that I felt a wish to know if there really was anything. But I did not make out much from Miss Kenneth's manner. My dearest Lisa, forgive me! What have I said?"

Lady Anne in her slow and gentle voyage of discovery, seemed suddenly to have struck upon a rock. Lisa leaned forward with a slight groan, and hid her face in her hands. Lady Anne's heart sank. She sat up on her sofa, and looked at the girl silently for a moment. Presently she began, rather hoarsely; "Lisa,

you told me just now that you belonged to me. I beg of you, my love, to tell me everything as if I was your mother. What sad mistake have I been making?"

"None, I hope," said Lisa, recovering herself, and answering the gentle pleading tones with a smile. "What is it that you want to know? I am ready to tell you anything."

"Then, my dear, what is the link between you and this young man?"

"Will came to us in Paris last May," said Lisa. "We met of course as old friends—and he, poor fellow, you see, was young and not very wise, so he let himself drift into caring for me. It was that, I think: we were together a great deal, and he followed me about everywhere. Then one day at Versailles he told me all about it," she said, smiling slightly and sadly at the remembrance. "And at first I told him it was quite out of the question. But he was so much in earnest, and I did like him very much—I see now that it was foolish and wrong of me—I told him that we would leave it for a year, to see if he would do something to distinguish himself. He was so lazy, and had failed at Oxford entirely through idleness. I told him that either of us who met the right person in the interval, was to let the other know."

"I understand," said Lady Anne with a little sigh of relief. "Then you are not bound to him at all. And that kind of character could not suit you, could it? Very good and amiable, I daresay, but I remember what you said to me about that."

"A most unfortunate thing happened to me," said Lisa. "Will insisted on giving me a ring—one of his mother's—which, of course, if nothing came of it, I

should have given back to him at the end of the year. I lost the ring in a most painful way. Now will you promise me something?"

"Certainly, my dear."

"Say nothing to Spenser about it."

Lady Anne gazed at her niece in astonishment. Lisa saw the look, and the faint smile hovering round her mouth, and coloured deeply. Then she hastened to tell the story of the ring, in as few words as possible. Lady Anne listened with the most earnest attention.

"Well," she said, "it was a wonderful piece of good fortune that Spenser bought the ring. If he knew, of course he would give it back to you. Why won't you let me tell him?"

"I do not want him to know—at least not at present," said Lisa. "I felt obliged to tell Will, and he begged me never to mention it again. He has the most generous nature. I think you would like Will, aunt Anne. You can understand that this and other things keep him very much in my mind."

"Yes. But you still puzzle me a little. It was certainly you who first hinted to me the possibility of his marrying Miss Kenneth."

"I know I did," said Lisa. "It would be the best thing for him in many ways. She is an heiress, and the estates join, and it would be the healing of a family quarrel. Fate would seem to swing round again from wrong to right, if those two were married. And I told him he ought to marry some one who would admire him, instead of laughing at him as I always did. But I don't like Miss Kenneth herself very much, and I don't think it will ever come to anything. I am dread-

fully afraid, do you know, that he will be constant to me. My troubles about Will are not at all ended. And the worst of it is, that though my reason wishes him to marry this girl, the rest of me seems to rebel against it. Now I have told you everything," she said, looking up, "as if you were my mother herself. I never have told any one so much, but I never had a friend like you."

"My darling," said Lady Anne affectionately, "all I can say is that you shall never repent trusting me. Now, I will be candid in my turn, and tell you that I only see one way out of the difficulty. It is that the right person should appear, and make you really sure of yourself. I know it is very sad to disappoint those who are attached to you, but some people have to pay that penalty for being a little more attractive than the rest of humanity. This poor Will is not the first young man who has adored a woman superior to himself, and has had to make up his mind bravely to live without her. If he is worth anything at all, it won't do him any harm. At any rate, it would never do for you to throw yourself away, and waste your life in an ill-assorted marriage, which I really think it would be. But somebody else must convince you of that. I had better leave it to him."

Lisa sat silently looking on the ground.

"I should like to know," said Lady Anne presently, in a low voice, "if you have any idea who is in my mind."

"I think, perhaps, I have," answered Lisa.

"Well, darling, I may tell you that very real happiness is within your reach, if you will only be wise enough to take it. I won't talk about the position and

so on, for I know you don't care about that, though I must confess that it adds to my pleasure for you. Think about it. He is coming to-morrow."

Lisa did not speak. As she sat there thinking, with a face rather too sad for a girl who had just received so flattering an announcement, the afternoon letters were brought in.

Then, after a minute, an exclamation from Lady Anne made her niece look up suddenly.

"Read that, Lisa," and she put an open letter into her hand.

"My dear Lady Anne—I have just heard that my uncle Fareham is dangerously ill at Florence. I must go to him at once, and shall probably start to-night. I will write to you when I get there. I very much regret that I cannot find time to run down to St. George's before I go, but I leave my interests in your kind and wise hands. Remember me to Lisa.—Yours affectionately, "SPENSER CORBET."

A firm, decided hand-writing, like that of a man who had won all his battles. Of course Fortune had been on his side, but, as Lisa said once, how can you measure people, except by their success?

Yet, now that the conquering hero was come, that Lisa's life-long ideal had set up herself as his ambition's highest price, she read his letter with no feeling but a little relief that she need not make up her mind so soon. No doubt Spenser Corbet was very much more to be admired and respected than Will Thorpe, but yet——

Lady Anne would have been both grieved and surprised if she could have read the thoughts in Lisa's mind that night.

CHAPTER XII.

NEW HOUSES.

"Ah, dreary March month! is this then a time for building wearily?
Sad, sad to think that the year is but begun."

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

THAT March afternoon the grass was bending and quivering before a strong east wind, which raised clouds of dust in the roads, blowing it across the freshly-painted palings against the bright red fronts of Will Thorpe's new houses in the Long Croft. But the sun shone with all his returning strength, and nobody minded the wind, unbecoming as it was.

The quarry people had been busy all day moving from old abodes into new, palaces by contrast. Lennard's Lane, soon to be pulled down, looked more miserable than ever. The crumbling, wretched cottages seemed only waiting with dismal resignation to be swept off the face of the earth. Curiosity had brought a good many visitors from Mallam and Selbridge, to look on, or lend a hand in the moving. Will, the landlord, walked about from house to house, followed by looks of smiling admiration, and there were other distinguished visitors as well—Alfred Perrott, swallowed up in an Ulster coat, with his hands in his pockets; Julia Kenneth, who had driven over in her pony-cart, and had picked up Charlotte by the way. Tiny was at home with a bad cold.

The two girls walked about at first with Will, Julia

talking to the people in her frank way, Lotty silent and rather contemptuous. Presently Archer came up and asked Will to go with him as far as his old house at the upper end of the lane.

"Perhaps the ladies might find it pleasanter here," he suggested. "The wind cuts down the gully like a knife."

"I don't mind the wind," said Julia. "Is there anything to see?"

"I was only going to show Mr. Thorpe how bad things really were—what he's saved us from, Miss Kenneth," said Archer. "The back of my house has spared us the trouble of pulling it down. It shows how they were put up—not meant to last long, I should say."

"Oh, I must come and see it too," said Julia. "I remember the first day I walked up the lane, and saw your house. Last September; six months ago."

"And we don't forget that we owe our new houses partly to you, ma'am," said Archer.

"Nothing of the kind," answered Julia, laughing. "Are you coming?" she said, turning to Lotty.

"I think not," said Lotty, and she turned away towards her brother, who was standing with a grim smile on his face, watching the younger members of the Penn family, as they tottered into their new dwelling under the weight of tables and chairs. He looked round as she came up, and they both glanced after the three who were walking quickly across the road towards the entrance of the lane.

"Why didn't you go with them?" said Alfred.

"Because I'm sick of them," replied Lotty, laconically.

"You have been cross for months. What's the matter with you? You have not got over Tiny's going to London yet. What is the good of sulking, when a thing is over and done with."

"If things *were* over and done with! But they are not," said Lotty, "and that is just it. We have all made a mess of it somehow. I thought you were so sharp, and you have let everything be taken out of your hands. Tiny sticks to Matthew in spite of everything, and that Will Thorpe, who spoilt all by coming here, will marry Julia and have both the estates. I did think you would manage to get something for yourself. I wonder you stay here at all."

"Because I am not such a fool as you," said Alfred. "I'll give you leave to call me one, though, if Will Thorpe does get everything he wants. So far from having two estates, I shall be surprised if he has one."

"At any rate he will have Selbridge. Julia worships him."

"Why—he is half engaged already."

"Oh, that will come to nothing. Julia let out to me that Miss Dalbiac doesn't care for him. She found that out when she saw her. There is somebody else in the wind. Tiny saw him. He is a lord now, I believe. And Kean wrote to Tiny the other day and told her that she didn't know how it would be, but they talked about nobody else at St. George's Palace. So he may have Miss Dalbiac, and I wish him joy of her. And Will Thorpe will have Julia Kenneth and Selbridge. Old Sir Thomas will be as pleased as Punch."

"Very well. You always were amazingly clever,"

said Alfred. "I'll tell you this, then. It is just possible that he won't have Mallam."

"How do you make that out? I thought you and papa had been more civil to Matthew lately. I wanted to ask you why. You were angry enough after Julia Kenneth had him to dinner with Tiny that night in the autumn."

"Yes, she did us there," said Alfred, smiling. "However, there was a little crack even then, and it is ever widening, as the poet says. Mr. Will won't be without his punishment, for turning everything here topsy-turvy. He confessed to me himself that his uncle never cared to hear about these cottages. The fact is, you know, the Squire is jealous. No wonder; and jealousy leads to a good many things, let me tell you. And then, when Will is left with an income considerably reduced from what it was this time last year, what with cottages that cost hundreds more than they need, and other people's debts as well—why, he won't be quite such a desirable son-in-law for Sir Thomas Kenneth."

"I wouldn't be too sure, if I were you, that the Squire won't stick to him through all. He likes him better than he ever liked anybody before."

"We shall see," said Alfred. "Good day, Mrs. Penn. I suppose you are glad to get into comfortable quarters."

"Why bless you," said fat Mrs. Penn, dropping a feather-bed at her feet, and smiling upon them with folded arms. "The thought of it's kept us alive all the winter. And I hopes as him as has done it 'll have his reward both i' this world and the next. That's all I've got to say, Mr. Alfred."

"Ah! you wouldn't have got your houses so soon out of the Squire."

"That there man's like a piece o' stone," said Mrs. Penn, her face darkening. "We don't owe him no thanks, that's certain. And what's more, he needn't be expectin' on 'em. It'd serve him right if every man in the place was to say as he wouldn't work for him not another hour. My master's said so many a time."

"That would be awkward," said Alfred, with a slight smile.

"The more awk'ard it was, the righter it'd serve him."

"But we don't all get what we deserve in this world."

"No, we doesn't, and a good thing, too, for some people, my word!"

Mrs. Penn snatched up her feather-bed, shook and punched it, as if it was the Squire himself, an operation which made Lotty and Alfred move backwards hastily, and marched on into her new house, still muttering angrily.

"Mr. Lennard would hardly enjoy that sort of thing," said Alfred to his sister.

"I should think not. What horrid people these are!"

"A blackguard lot. So I always told Thorpe, but he would not listen to me. And that Archer, with his smooth looks and speeches, is the worst of them all. I wish I had asked that woman what he thought about it. You would have heard something worth listening to."

Will himself thought it was rather good-natured of

Alfred to take an interest in his new houses, and to walk over on the great day of the flitting. As to Julia Kenneth's friendly sympathy, he had learnt to expect that on every occasion. She and her father had been his great helps and counsellors all through the time of building, and Sir Thomas had even offered to advance him money, but up till now Will had paid everything himself. He felt a little uncomfortable now and then at the decided reduction in his income, but consoled himself with the thought that the houses were sure to pay. And—perhaps he was too trustful and unsuspicious, but he could not see any reason to fear a change in his uncle's intentions. He was very happy that day, as he watched the furniture going into the new houses, and began to feel that his winter's work was done. Yet there was something grave and anxious in his happiness, a cloud of soberness over the joy, an unwillingness to think of the future that seemed as if it might be drawing so near. But Julia Kenneth saw the far-away look in his eyes as she wished him good-bye that afternoon, and there was something in her manner that seemed to accord itself with his doubtful mood.

"Good-bye, she said. "Here is a good wish for you. I hope everything you undertake may be as successful as this."

"Thank you," said Will. "And I hope I may always have such kind friends to help me through."

He walked briskly home, and found his uncle sitting over the library fire. Mr. Lennard had changed his habits a good deal that winter. He no longer went out walking with his stick and his dogs, but spent most of his time indoors, reading, or more often half

asleep in his chair. Will did not think he seemed well; he felt the cold so much, comparatively slight as it had been, and his fine head of hair seemed to grow thinner and greyer every day. He had lost a good deal too of the cynical cheerfulness of last year. His gleams of fun and sweetness were almost gone, and he was generally both sad and irritable, taking a dark view of everything. Not a very congenial character for a young man to spend his life with, but, on the whole, Will seemed to have got through the winter with him very well. He had of course been thoroughly occupied with his building, and besides that his uncle had hired a horse for him, and he had hunted once or twice a week, not to mention plenty of shooting. And his affection for his uncle, his gratitude to this lonely man who had made a son of him, were strong enough to bear a good deal of trial and provocation.

"Uncle Lennard," he said, walking up to the fire, "we have got through our flitting. The people will all sleep under their new roofs to-night."

"Why did not you stay and sleep there too?"

Will laughed. "I talked to them a little about keeping the places clean and tidy," he said. "They are not much used to that. But it is a great thing to be tidy to begin with."

"I suppose you feel like a father to them all. Did they prostrate themselves all round and offer thanksgiving?"

"They are not of the prostrating kind, thank goodness."

"At least they gave you a cheer?"

"Not even that to-day. They were too busy. I walked off quietly."

"Ungrateful brutes!"

"I don't much believe in ingratitude. It is one's own fault if one expects too much."

"Expect an ill turn for a good one, and you will be about right. It is a sickening subject. What is your activity going to do next?"

"Well—in a month or two I hope to be engaged, you know," said Will, looking gravely into the fire.

"May one ask to whom?"

"Have you forgotten? To Miss Dalbiac, of course."

"Oh, the fair Antigone. She still reigns, does she? And what if she won't have you?"

"Then—I don't know. British Columbia—or any place where there is hard work to be done."

"There is some sense in that. But I expect she will have you, and with a great deal of pleasure. Her father left her nothing, did he?"

"I believe not. But she is with her aunt Lady Anne Corbet, who is very fond of her, and you may be sure she has plenty of opportunities, if she chooses to take any of them," said Will, rather gloomily. "I don't feel at all certain, myself."

"What a foolish fellow you are! Why don't you put an end to all the uncertainty by marrying Miss Kenneth? They are always running after you."

"That is the old story, uncle Lennard. Don't go back to it again, please."

"You will get yourself into a scrape by this other marriage. You will want more money to spend than I can give you. There will be no limit to her expectations, after living with Lady Annes and people of that kind."

"You don't know her," said Will quietly.

"I can very well imagine her. I foresee this. I shall have to take refuge in an almshouse, while you and your aristocratic bride set yourselves up here. What a delightful change for the neighbourhood! You will build new cottages, of course, all over the estate, and how popular you will be! Nobody will know whether I am dead or alive, and I have the comfort of feeling that nobody will care."

As he said this, in a low, weary, peevish voice, Mr. Lennard sat in a careless drooping attitude, leaning his head on one hand, and letting the other hang straight and limp over the arm of his chair. Will, standing near him on the rug, was silent for a minute.

"Uncle Lennard," he said presently, "when you say things like that, you make me wish that I had never come here at all."

"Thank you. A very grateful and considerate wish," said his uncle in the same tone.

This kind of thing went on all the evening. Will spoke very little; he knew well that silence was best, when every word was an additional irritation. A very long weary evening it was, the wind howling in the chimneys, trees creaking outside, strange cracks and noises in the old woodwork of the house. Will was heartily glad when it came to an end.

The change in his uncle kept him sadly awake for a long time that night. The kindliness which used to be hidden under Mr. Lennard's sharp words seemed to be dead and gone. All his intercourse with Will was cold, careless, contemptuous. No sympathy in his work or his love; both alike half laughed at and half disap-

proved of. And now, added to all this, a tone of bitter personal complaint, which was both painful and incomprehensible. With this atmosphere at home, there was not much satisfaction to be found in twelve new cottages by the builder of them.

CHAPTER XIII.

CLOUDS IN WILL'S SKY.

"The rolling hours bring heavy heat of noon,
The creeping mist descends,
The mountain tops and the blue heavens are hid,
And the clear pathway ends."

E. D. CROSS.

WILL had made an engagement for the next day to join Sir Thomas and Miss Kenneth in one of their frequent drives to the large town some miles off, whose smoke was sometimes to be seen from Mallam hovering on the western horizon. He had made one of the party on these occasions several times before, and it was always a pleasant day. Julia never had too much shopping, and what she had to do was done in an off-hand amusing style. Sir Thomas went off on business of his own, and the two young people amused themselves as they liked, and met him at the hotel for lunch at two o'clock. There were generally a few Smith volumes to be changed at the station, which was a large and lively one, a junction for the north and west. All the trains stopped here, and distinguished-looking people going to Scotland sometimes found themselves obliged to wait here for an hour or two.

On this particular day a train from London came up just as Will and Julia had arrived at the bookstall. A gentleman got out, and walked slowly along the platform. He had the princely and statesman-like ta-

lent of never forgetting a face. So as they both turned round to look at the train, he looked at them and knew them at once. Julia knew him too, and Will was not likely to have forgotten the lucky fellow who got into the great yellow carriage and drove off with Lisa Dalbiac, while he was shut out and left behind.

"It is Lord Fareham," said Julia. "Does he remember me, I wonder! What can he be doing here!"

The slight additional colour was not brought to Julia's cheek by the sight of Lord Fareham himself, but by the recollections and associations that he brought suddenly to her mind. He, on his part, found the sight of these two together rather pleasant and reassuring, and was at once ready with a very cordial greeting.

"I have not seen your aunt for months," he said to Julia, as they stood talking by the bookstall. "I have been away all the winter, till two or three weeks ago, and since I came back I have been very deeply engaged."

"We don't hear very often from my aunt," said Julia, "Does Miss Dalbiac go there to paint now?"

"Now and then, but not constantly, I think."

"Is she well?" said Will. "I suppose you have seen her?"

"I have seen her twice. She does seem pretty well," said Lord Fareham, raising his eyes deliberately to Will's face and looking at him.

The young fellow had not been able to ask his questions in a totally unconcerned tone, or to banish every atom of eagerness from his expression. Thus the two men were not very fairly matched, for Spenser Corbet had self-control enough for both of them.

Till now it had never occurred to Will to be jealous of this distant cousin of Lisa's, except as being connected with her, and having the privilege of seeing her at all sorts of times. But now something in Lord Fareham's manner, carefully guarded as it was, flashed into his mind the thought that here was the rival he had to fear. Of course! this clever, successful, good-looking man must have good taste enough to admire her beyond everything, and was also just the distinguished person that she had talked of in old days. This was serious indeed. No one had hinted to him that it was likely to be the case; certainly not Julia; not Lotty, to whom she had told her convictions, but who was not inclined to do anything in the way of driving Will towards a Selbridge haven of refuge. The new idea absorbed all Will's senses for the moment. He did not hear what Lord Fareham was saying to Julia, and stood gazing dreamily at a book in his hand till she turned and spoke to him.

"Lord Fareham has an hour to wait here. He would like to see the town. Shall we show it to him?"

"Most happy," said Will, and he walked out of the station with his companions, rather thankful that it was not necessary for him to make himself agreeable.

Julia did all that. She was at her best that day, cheerful, and not at all fierce; and she and Lord Fareham talked away pleasantly as they went up the street. Presently Will, not without pleasure, remembered a commission that Sir Thomas had given him.

"There was that paper we were to ask for at Tarrant's office," he said to Julia. "It is down that street, I think. If you like to walk on, I'll overtake you."

"All right; thank you," she answered, and Will turned down a side street.

"Mr. Thorpe is a neighbour of yours, I think," said Lord Fareham.

"Yes, and a great friend. You should talk to my father about him; there is no subject he likes better," said Julia smiling.

"Very energetic, isn't he, in redressing grievances, and so on? I remember your talking of his work one day in the autumn."

"He is the best fellow in the world, and gets little enough credit for it," said Julia, with a heartiness which did not quite please his lordship, who would have preferred something more sentimental.

Lady Anne had frightened him a little with her account of Thorpe. This tiresome boy seemed to have a trifle more harm in him than they had at first supposed; though neither of them could believe that a woman like Lisa would in the end prefer him to Spenser Corbet.

"I wonder if you could enlighten me," he said. "I don't quite like asking Miss Dalbiac questions about her past life—have you any idea how intimate Mr. Thorpe was with them?"

Julia was silent for a minute.

"Don't think me impertinent and curious," he said. "I am related to her, you know, and very much interested in her. Naturally, I want to know about her friends."

"Oh, I quite understand," said Julia. "Very intimate indeed, I fancy. At least, Colonel Dalbiac seems almost to have treated Mr. Thorpe as a son."

"Ah! He went to stay with them in Paris, I think."

"He was in Paris at the same time—I don't think he stayed with them. It was after that, though, that Colonel Dalbiac was so very paternal. In the autumn—but I suppose I ought not to tell you, Lord Fareham."

"Do you mean that he was telegraphed for, when the colonel was dying? That I am aware of."

"No; before that. I don't know why I should tell you, I am sure—except that it will pretty well show you what terms they were on, as you wish to find that out. Colonel Dalbiac owed £500 to a man who lives near us; he is a lawyer, and agent to Mr. Thorpe's uncle. I daresay the man behaved badly about the money. At least, he insisted on its being paid. So Colonel Dalbiac wrote to Mr. Thorpe, and asked him to pay it. That was treating him as rather more than a friend, wasn't it?"

"And he paid it?" said Lord Fareham.

"Of course."

"But surely he has been repaid!"

"It is possible, but I don't think so. Colonel Dalbiac died very soon after. If you care for my opinion, it is this, that Miss Dalbiac never knew of the debt at all, much less who paid it. I am sure he never told her."

"You only do Miss Dalbiac justice. And may I ask who was your informant? Mr. Thorpe himself?"

"You do him injustice," said Julia, with spirit. "If you must know, I heard it from the man's daughter to whom the money was paid. Ah, by the by, do you remember a girl—Miss Perrott—who was staying with my aunt in the autumn?"

"Perfectly. She knew Miss Dalbiac."

"It was her father. She is the best of them."

Lord Fareham gazed gravely on the pavement. The story had evidently impressed him, and Julia was not sorry, though she wondered what had made her tell it. Bad and good motives had both had something to do with it, perhaps. The consciousness of the former made her say rather hurriedly,—"I suppose I cannot ask you not to tell Miss Dalbiac, but I am afraid it will bother her, and I am half sorry I told you, after all. Mr. Thorpe would be vexed, I know."

"I cannot possibly express my gratitude to you for telling me," said Spenser, looking at her, his grave face lighted up with a smile. "There is nothing so horrible as an unknown obligation like this. One feels it in the air. As to who is told, and how the matter is settled, you can leave all that quite happily to me. Only be sure that you have done an untold kindness by putting the thing into the right hands."

"Yours are the right hands, are they?" said Julia.

"I think so," he answered, quietly.

There could be no further explanation, for their *tête-à-tête* was at an end. Will came up at the moment. Julia rather withdrew herself, and watched with some amusement Lord Fareham's new manner with Will, a friendly attempt at drawing out, which had not very great success. They talked about the town, admiring the fine modern buildings in the principal street. He told them something about himself too, that he was going to Scotland to see one of his new estates; and he even held out to Will a prospect of shooting there next season.

"Thank you," said Will. "But I don't know where I shall be in the autumn."

They walked about for some time. Julia invited Lord Fareham to lunch with them at the hotel, and make acquaintance with her father, but this he declined, and parted with them at the door on his way back to the station.

As they crossed the hall, Julia looked at Will and laughed.

"You were not at all too gracious about the shooting."

"Was I rude?" said Will. "I didn't mean to be that. But it is a fact, you know. For anything I can tell, next autumn may find me in British Columbia."

"Was that it? I thought perhaps you did not like him."

"Well, one can always find at least two reasons. Perhaps I have seen people I like better."

"So have I. He has not a good effect on me at all. Actually, papa not in yet!"

It was a cheerful room at the Royal Oak, in which Sir Thomas generally took his luncheon on these occasions. The bow-window looked out into the market-square, and if there was any sunshine, this window was always full of it. Julia took off her hat and sat down in a sturdy old chair in the sunniest corner, glancing up at the glittering hands of the clock on the market-hall.

"What do you mean when you talk about British Columbia?" she said to Will. "You are not in earnest?"

"Don't you think it is better to be prepared for everything?" said Will. "There is more than one event on the cards, which may send me over seas before I am many months older."

Julia was going to speak, but checked herself, and

looked out of the window again. Then they heard Sir Thomas's voice in the hall, asking if they were come in, on which she glanced back at Will and said rather hurriedly, "If you are driven abroad, it will not be by having no friends in England."

"No, I am sure it won't," said Will. "Thank you."

A strange thing happened at Mallam that afternoon. Mr. Perrott paid half-an-hour's visit to the great house, at the end of which the Squire came out with him, stick in hand, and they two walked away together through the park, out of the gates, and across by the field way towards the quarries. Through yellow grass fields, through the brown tasselled nut-wood, through a wonderful concert of small birds in the hedges. They seemed to chatter more than usual, from surprise at seeing Mr. Lennard pass. It was years since any eye had seen him beyond his own park gates.

Mr. Perrott marched along, upright and full of importance. Mr. Lennard lounged carelessly beside him, his eyes generally on the ground, but now and then raised to look about him with a sort of curiosity at the young springing life of this strange world, the white lambs racing up and down the slopes, the soft distance under the spring sun, the leaves escaping from their prison, the primroses and violets that began to star the ground under every hedge.

"Fine growing weather," said Mr. Perrott with satisfaction.

"Ah! and you think the young fellow wishes me to see his work. Very good-natured of you. I am not sure that he or any of his *protégés* deserves the compliment."

"My dear sir, you hardly do your nephew justice, or the people either. You should always give people an opportunity of showing gratitude. It does them good."

"Don't talk about gratitude. I want no humbug of that kind. I am just going to see what the fellow has been doing all the winter. Not that I care about it, but one cannot really judge till one has seen."

"That is exactly what I say. And I feel pretty sure, whether you expect it or not, that you will derive some gratification from this visit. Mr. Thorpe must have made you very popular among the quarry-men. With his attachment to you, it is quite certain."

"They don't know I am coming!" exclaimed Mr. Lennard, stopping short, in dread of an ovation. "If you and Will have got up any foolery, I shall go back at once."

"Dear me, no! Nothing of the kind!" cried Mr. Perrott. "Give us credit for knowing you better than that! Only an idea of my own, asking you to walk over and see for yourself. Mr. Thorpe will be surprised, and so will the people. Nobody expects you."

Thus reassured, Mr. Lennard walked on.

There was no work going on at the quarries that afternoon. The trucks stood still on the siding, birds fluttered fearlessly about the face of the cliff, and perched on the great yellow blocks of stone. Besides their voices, the only sound was the trickling and splashing of the stream. Mr. Perrott led his employer round the quarry, and then down the deserted lane. Mr. Lennard looked from side to side and whistled.

"The people may be glad to be out of this," he said, half to himself.

"No doubt they feel proportionately grateful," said the agent benevolently.

"That is just what I doubt," said Mr. Lennard.

Perhaps, after all, people are sometimes glad to find themselves mistaken. When Will's uncle came in sight of the row of new houses, with their smart fronts, with men digging in the gardens, or smoking and looking about them, women appearing at the doors, children playing in the road, a cheerful sound of contented talk and laughter going up into the fresh spring air from these usually grumbling throats, he stood still with a softened face. He said nothing, but to judge from his expression, one of his best moments had come to him once more, forcing its way through jealousies and cynical prejudices. Mr. Perrott glanced at him, slightly surprised. If one did not fear to do injustice to this excellent man, one would say disappointed.

"A pleasing spectacle," said Mr. Perrott, after they had stood for a minute or two looking on.

"The young fellow must have spent a good deal more than he could afford," said Mr. Lennard, and he began walking forward towards the cottages.

But then came a change. People looked up and saw them coming. Two or three mothers called their children roughly in, and slammed the house-doors. Some of the men lounged off down the road, others went on with their digging or their smoking without taking any apparent notice. A group of little boys ran away a few yards, and then stopped to stare. Mrs. Penn came out of her house and shouted to some stray members of her family.

"Here, Phil, Joe! come along in, will ye. Here's the old gentleman a-comin', and if he catches you he'll

put you up the chimney. He don't think the likes of you's fit for nothing better."

Her boys did not come in answer to this warning, and she stood in the garden to stare at the unusual visitors, disdaining to fly and hide herself as the other women had done.

If Mr. Lennard had only known, a good deal of this evident dislike was meant for his agent, not himself. Many of the people did not know him by sight at all, and they all regarded Mr. Perrott as a natural enemy: he had so often been hard upon them for the rent of their old cottages, besides his obduracy about repairs. Now that they were no longer so entirely in his hands, the temptation to show their feelings was not to be resisted.

The two men walked quietly on, and stopped near the gate of the end cottage. At the same moment its door was opened by Archer. He had been reading, but had caught a glimpse of them through the window, and now came out in his old thin black jacket, looking quiet, grave, and respectable.

"Ah, there's the foreman," said Mr. Perrott. "So you are not at work to-day, Archer?"

"No, Mr. Perrott. We're enjoying ourselves."

"So it seems. Do you know this gentleman? It is Mr. Lennard."

"I was thinking it might be," said Archer, touching his hat, with an unmoved countenance.

Mr. Lennard returned the salutation carelessly.

"Well," he said pleasantly enough, "you all seem very comfortably settled here. The only thing your people want is a few lessons in manners. Diamonds, no doubt, but rough ones."

Mr. Lennard stood with his hands in his pockets, smiling slightly, and glancing towards Mrs. Penn, who was staring and scowling at him from a neighbouring garden.

"Yes, sir; we are comfortably settled, thanks to our good friend Mr. Thorpe," said Archer. "He's a true gentleman, as we all say very often. He makes one believe in the thing. There's nothing like a living example. He's almost turned me into a Tory."

"What did you originally call yourself?" said Mr. Lennard.

"Oh, a Radical, of course. And I'm not converted. Nobody need think for one minute that I am."

"It must be a comfort to your friends to know that," said Mr. Lennard. "I don't think my nephew would wish to turn you into a Tory. He has no opinions of his own, and won't set any up, I suppose, till he stands for the county."

"I beg your pardon, sir. He has principles, at any rate," said Archer. "He has a noble sympathy with his fellow-creatures. None of our leaders can go further than he does in the opinion that every human being has a right to equal advantages in a free country. A man who acts up to his principles like Mr. Thorpe has no need to call himself by any party name. He is sure to have a following."

"You are an orator," said Mr. Lennard. "Why do you throw yourself away on my stone-quarries?"

"I have often asked myself the same question," said Archer, shrugging his shoulders.

"Indeed! And how did you answer it? Perhaps

you find the part of 'village Hampden' not so unbearable."

"Well sir, at any rate there are many parts more useless and more disgraceful," replied Archer. "That of the 'little tyrant,' for instance."

"My good fellow, remember who you are talking to," interrupted Mr. Perrott, rather shocked.

"I'm quite aware," said Archer, smiling. "And I don't think Mr. Lennard misunderstands me."

"No, we are quite on equal terms," said the Squire. "I am glad you brought me here, Perrott. I must say my expectations did not come near the fact."

He turned round and walked away. Mr. Perrott lingered a moment, with a very solemn face, to remonstrate with Archer.

"What could you be thinking about! Was that the way to speak to the Squire—Mr. Thorpe's uncle too?"

"It'll do him no harm," said Archer. "There's nothing sharpens a man up so much as finding out what other people really think of him."

"Shameful, shameful!" said Mr. Perrott, shaking his head. "What next, I wonder!"

"You'll find that out, maybe, in a day or two."

"What do you mean?"

"I decline to say any more," said Archer. "Don't you concern yourself, Mr. Perrott. We're Mr. Thorpe's tenants now. We don't belong to you and him any longer."

Mr. Perrott looked very grave, but had not time just then to resent the defiance; for his attention and Archer's were both suddenly attracted by a scrimmage of some kind a little further up the road. One of

those terrible young Penns, standing with his companions to watch Mr. Lennard pass, had been moved by an evil spirit to pick up a good-sized stone and throw it after him. It hit him between the shoulders, and he turned instantly round. If it had not been for that, more stones would have followed, for several small boys were following Phil Penn's lead, and snatching them up from the ground. But the Squire's pale face as he turned upon them, with eyes flashing fire, and hand clenched on his stick, was too much for these imps; they turned and scampered off as hard as they could. Mr. Lennard stood looking after them for a moment. Then his eyes fell on Mr. Perrott, coming up aghast to the rescue, and he laughed. Such a laugh, Mrs. Penn said, she never did hear.

"Come along, Perrott. Don't be afraid; they won't stone you," he said, as he walked away. "This is gratitude, is it? this is popularity! I almost think it would be better to be unpopular. My nephew has really succeeded too well in his kind efforts for me."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Perrott in a trembling voice, "do me the justice to believe that I had no idea——"

"Of course not. Do you know, I am uncommonly glad to have seen with my eyes, heard with my ears, and felt with my bones, what Will's pet people really are. I had my suspicions, but they fell short of the reality. Now I am perfectly satisfied."

Mr. Lennard talked all the way home, and had no attention at all to spare for lambs or birds or spring flowers. Mr. Perrott listened nervously, and calculated the consequences.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE END OF PHILANTHROPY.

"The place
Where I left off was where he felt to fail
His courage, Madam, through the fancy base
That they who love, endure, or work, may rail
And cease—if all their love, the works they wrought,
And their endurance, men have set at nought."

JEAN INGELOW.

ALFRED PERROTT laughed loudly and irreverently when his father told him of his adventure with the Squire at the Long Croft. They were sitting together after dinner. Mr. Perrott poured himself out a glass of wine, and looked at his son with a doubtful gravity. "What is there to laugh at, Alfred?" he said. "Pray remember that I acted on your suggestion."

"Oh yes, I remember," said Alfred. "The scene was grander than I expected, that was all. Of course it was quite right that he should see the cottages."

"Quite right. And at first, do you know, I believe he was really inclined to be pleased. But the people's manner was so very offensive; and Archer was all but insolent. And that little rascal, with his stone, would have been too much for anybody. And there is worse to come, Alfred, if I am not very much mistaken. It seems almost beyond the limits of human depravity—but I feel convinced that I saw signs of a strike. Dear, dear me! what an excellent proverb is 'Let well alone!'

and how wise Mr. Thorpe would have been, if he had acted on it!"

"You told him so, didn't you?" said Alfred.

"Many times. I warned him that he was running his head into a peck of troubles."

"The fellow is an idiot," said Alfred. "If you had told me last year that he would come here, and have such a splendid chance in life put into his hands, and muddle it away with philanthropy and nonsense till I wouldn't give sixpence for it, I should not have believed you. I should have said, Don't tell me that any man could be such a fool. Matt Lennard is an obstinate little ass, but he's worth a dozen of that great baby."

"Ah! you may be right," said Mr. Perrott, shaking his head.

"Now, leave off being sorrowful, and let us understand each other," said Alfred. "There don't seem to be two people in Mallam in possession of their senses, except you and me. We are agreed, I think, that the best thing for the place is to get rid of a meddlesome fellow, who was brought here by a whim, and has no business here at all, and has shown what an idiot he is by taking up with a set of Radical roughs. He has spoilt all our plans, made us as uncomfortable as possible without any compensation—taken us in to begin with, by pretending to carry on with Tiny. Come, you can't say that we owe him much consideration. Besides, the fellow is a bore to his uncle. If he was no end of comfort to the Squire, one might feel differently."

"What do you mean, Alfred?" said Mr. Perrott

rather nervously. "What are you thinking of? We must leave it all to fate; we can't do anything."

"Leave it to fate; that is just what I want," said Alfred. "If fate likes to bring on a strike at the quarries, and whatever may follow upon that event, let her. It was she, I fancy, who showed that little villain a stone lying convenient. By Jove! I wonder what kind of evening Master Will is spending with his uncle. But perhaps he is stopping to dine with his friends, after their long day together."

"Oh, come, this is private spite. We can't listen to this sort of thing," said Mr. Perrott, smiling.

"Call it what you like," laughed Alfred in answer. Only let fate have her own way, and don't interfere with her."

"Poor Tiny!" said Mr. Perrott, with benevolence, "I should like to be able to make her happy, with a clear conscience."

"In my opinion," said Alfred, "her affairs have been looking up considerably during the last few months."

Will and his uncle, however, were not spending the bad time together that Alfred was pleased to imagine. Mr. Lennard was particularly lively and cheerful that evening, asked questions about the day's doings, and absolutely laughed once or twice. He said not a word of his own adventures till Will had gone upstairs with him, and stopped to wish him good-night at his door, on the way to his own room. Mr. Lennard stood in the doorway, the firelight flickering behind him over the high unfurnished walls of his great desolate room. The one picture over the mantelpiece was completely hidden in the shadow.

"What did those cottages cost you?" he said suddenly, stopping Will as he turned down the passage.

Will thought a moment, and told him the amount he had already paid.

"Fairly cheap, I suppose. They seem well built and comfortable."

"They are, I think. I wish you would look at them some day," said Will, hardly taking in the meaning of his uncle's words, and emboldened by this new interest and kindness.

"Very good-natured of you. But I don't find it a safe neighbourhood to walk in. Perrott suggested that I ought to see them, and I went over this afternoon with him. The grown-up people were insolent, and the children threw stones at me."

Will's first idea was that his uncle had suddenly gone out of his mind. The horrified look in his eyes perhaps said as much.

"I am not dreaming; nor are you, I believe," said Mr. Lennard. "What was to be expected from savages like these!"

"I should never have expected *that!*" exclaimed Will. "Good heavens! what am I to do to them?"

"Anything you please," said Mr. Lennard. "Send all the men and women to colonise some desert island, and all the children to a reformatory. You seem surprised. I was not the least surprised, either by their conduct or yours, which must have led to it."

"What do you mean?" said Will.

"Well—if the people had been much impressed with your respect for me, I perhaps should not have been called 'a little tyrant,' and so on."

"Who can have called you that?"

"Mr. Archer, the foreman, a particular friend of yours, according to himself. But pray don't look as if I had told you something more horrible and unnatural than ever was heard before. It does not strike me in that way, I assure you. I find it rather enlivening. It proves to me, if I wanted any more proof, what an utterly mean and rascally thing human nature is."

"Uncle Lennard," began Will earnestly, "I don't know what to say or do. But I beg of you to believe me"——

"Ask something easier, my dear fellow. Good-night. Don't let the sins of human nature keep you awake."

He nodded carelessly to Will, entered his room and shut the door. Will stood for a minute in the passage, but soon collected himself and went his way.

Next morning, without saying anything more to his uncle, he walked off to the quarries immediately after breakfast. He found the men in full work, Archer at the head of them—he had quite recovered from his accident. They were so busy that their young landlord stood by for some minutes looking on, without exchanging more than a nod with any of them. At last Archer, having despatched some trucks down the line, came up to him, quite aware of the trouble in his face, and of the cause of it.

"A large order, sir," said Archer. "Never knew the work anything like what it has been this winter. I should say the quarries would soon be worked out, if it wasn't that they seem inexhaustible."

"Ah! Very lucky for us all," said Will. "Look here, Archer. I have a word to say to you."

"About yesterday, I suppose," said Archer, smiling.

"Yes. I was surprised to hear how badly you and the rest had behaved to my uncle. Surprised—and shocked and disgusted too. What on earth did you mean by it? He is your master still, though I built the cottages; and they never would have been built without him."

"How's that, sir?"

"Because I could not have done it without his consent."

"Well, Mr. Thorpe, I'm sorry *you* should be annoyed, but I'm not going to apologise to Mr. Lennard, for I don't feel it's necessary. He brought it on himself. He was angry because all the men didn't take off their hats to him. Half of 'em didn't even know him."

"Come, Archer, you were rude to him yourself. And the children threw stones at him. It was a disgraceful affair altogether."

"As to stones, there was only one thrown by little Phil Penn. You can't be very hard on eight year old. As to me, what did I do? He took me by the wrong handle altogether."

"He said you called him a little tyrant."

"Not till he called me a village Hampden."

"You need not have resented that, I should have thought. And as to the other, no one can call my uncle a tyrant, so it was a stupid thing to say, as well as being rude. I should have expected you to know better."

"Well, the whole affair isn't worth kicking up a dust about," said Archer, coolly. "If I was the Squire, I'd forget and forgive. We have no reason to be over much pleased with him. If ever hard work was badly paid, ours is. He gets a good bit of his income out

of these quarries, and grudges his men a couple of shillings extra. There's a want of justice in that, I think."

"You are very mistaken if you think that my uncle wants to make a row," said Will quietly, not taking any notice of these last grumblings. "But after he mentioned it to me last night, I felt bound to come over and speak to you. I hope it won't happen again."

"Not likely to, I daresay. The Squire will be shy of these parts," said Archer. "You'll excuse me, now, sir. There are some fellows round there that want a lot of looking after."

Will nodded, and looked after the foreman as he walked away. Certainly, that morning, his friend Archer was disappointing. He did not linger in the quarry, neither did he go towards the Long Croft, but climbed up the side of the hill, and struck off across a field of young corn.

A lark was singing high in the air, the sun was shining in a cloudless sky, and a slight breeze was playing with the tender green blades. Will crossed this field and one or two others without any clear idea where he was going, till he found himself at a stile on the Selbridge road. It seemed to him that this wretched affair wanted thinking over, and that he could not think while he walked. So he sat down on the step, and there remained, his face buried in his hands, till a quick step came along the grass by the side of the road, somebody stopped suddenly, and a hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Hollo, Will, old boy! What's the matter?"

Will, his hat pushed back on his head, looked up rather dismally. He saw a thin figure in black, with

a sallow face and dark anxious eyes—Matthew, in short, regarding him steadily and curiously.

"Don't stop moping here. Walk a little way with me," said Matthew.

Will roused himself, and immediately got over the stile to join his cousin.

"There was something I wanted to think about," he said, in apology for himself.

"Thinking don't agree with you, does it?" said Matthew, with one of his queer smiles. "I know all about it. I met Perrott in the village just now. He stopped very graciously and told me the whole story. I told him I did not know what else the old fellow had to expect."

"What did he say to that?" said Will.

"That you had had opportunities of making your uncle popular, which you appear to have wasted."

"Did they expect, then," said Will, "that I should spend my time down there in praising up my uncle? I never thought of such a thing. What would have been the use? The people are not fools. I could not have persuaded them that he was a good landlord. I could not have made him popular—how could I, without telling lies? He never took the smallest interest in them. I have just been rowing Archer for the way they treated him, but upon my word I don't know that it was so much to be wondered at. Why on earth did Perrott take him there? If he had gone with me, it would have been all right."

"Perhaps you would not surprise Perrott by telling him that," muttered Matthew. "Look here, Will," he went on aloud, "do you remember a warning I gave you one day last autumn? I told you the Perrotts were not

your friends. And now I tell you again that old Perrott thinks he has made a grand split between you and your uncle. I could see it in his manner when he came up to me this morning. I am not a hypocrite when I tell you that I hope he is wrong."

"I wish I had never come here," said Will.

"Nonsense. The people like you, and if you can hold on, you will do very well. If I was in your place I should feel doubtful, because I know I could never keep my temper with that uncle of ours. But you have kept straight with him so wonderfully all these months, that I don't think you ought to fail now. I wish I was out of it all. I wish I was a disinterested party, because then you would believe in me more than you do. Of course, I can't say that the estate is nothing to me,—but I do say that Tina and I would be contented if we had enough to live on—and I mean to have her, at any rate, in spite of her people. You can give me the living some day, when old Brocas dies, and then we shall do very well, with you and your beautiful lady at the big house."

All this, coming from the dry and undemonstrative Matthew, was pleasant and surprising. But the last words reminded Will of another trouble.

"Of course I believe in you," he said, "and I am infinitely obliged to you. I do begin to believe that those Perrotts are rascals. But even if this affair goes right for me, I am not at all sure that another will. I met a fellow at Burnbridge yesterday. You know I was there with the Kenneths."

Matthew said "yes," and then listened silently to Will's doubts and anxieties about Lord Fareham and Lisa.

"Well," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "if Antigone can forget her old friends and take up with a man because he is an earl, all I can say is, she is not the woman I always took her for. Have you any real reason for being frightened about it?"

"No, I suppose not. Only——"

"Then wait till you have."

Will laughed. It was wonderful how this talk with his cousin and rival, yet friend, had brightened him up and made him feel that life was worth living after all, that obstacles only rose to be conquered, and that if a man has done his best, he need not plague himself so much about not having done better. But that was not Lisa's doctrine, alas!

CHAPTER XV.

THIS OR THAT.

"E legno vidi giâ dritto e veloce
Correr lo mar per tutto suo cammino
Perire al fine all' entrar della foce."

DANTE.

THE storm seemed to blow over, as other storms do, sometimes only to come back again. Winds went down, showers fell, and March stole gently on into April, into that true spring weather which gathers up the charm of all the year, and pours it into a few sweet smiling days—warm sun, fresh air full of stirring life, as the soft wind blows from the west and brings out scent of violets and of young grass growing. The air is full of peaceful music, too, the rustle of swallows' wings, happy bird voices, "lisp of leaves and ripple of rain."

Will stood at the library window one morning, and looked out across the shadowy glades of the park where the morning sun made checkered patterns on the grass, and tiny yellow leaves were beginning to break out on the oak boughs. Will meditated that it was all just like this last year, before he had ever seen it. And along with the reflection, "I should have been much happier now if I had never seen it at all," came a sudden feeling of self-contempt. Happier! yes, perhaps, but younger, stupider, lighter, less thoughtful.

Will retracted his first thoughts, and was glad that

he had come to Mallam. He could not have wandered about the place for nine months, shot the covers, made friends with the tenants, without getting fond of it all; and the life with his uncle, difficult as it was sometimes, was capital training. Yes, it was all for the best, and everything seemed to be going on quietly now. Nothing disagreeable had happened at the quarries, or the Long Croft, since that day in March. His uncle had said no more about that, and now the people had settled into their houses, and the work was going on steadily. In a few weeks now Will's year would be up, and he would know his fate once for all.

Mr. Lennard was late that morning, and Will had time for these and a great many other thoughts before he appeared. At last he opened the door and came in, but not alone. Will, turning from the window, saw with some surprise that Mr. Perrott was with him. The Squire was unusually pale, and held an open letter in his hand. It was evident that something had happened.

"There he is. Tell him," said the Squire, and Mr. Perrott walked forward with a very grave face.

"Good morning, Mr. Thorpe. Were you aware of this? The work at the quarries is stopped. The men have struck for higher wages."

Thus the clouds returned, darkening the bright spring morning. Will had his back to the sunshine now, and the library with the two men standing there looked darker and gloomier than ever. He did not speak at once. Mr. Lennard walked across the room and threw himself into a chair.

"Come, Will, this is too much," he said, in a tone of angry impatience which was new to him. "Your

philanthropy has brought us to this. You have flattered and spoilt these people till they have lost all sense of their true position. Of course they have taken you into their confidence. You knew what was coming? I think you might have prepared me for it."

"Yes; excuse the remark, but you have scarcely behaved to your uncle with the honourable openness" —began Mr. Perrott.

"Have the goodness not to interfere, Mr. Perrott, between my uncle and me," said Will. He was pale, but his eyes were very bright, and there was nothing weak or boyish in his grave young face, as he looked towards the Squire. "You insult me, when you say that I was aware of this, and did not tell you of it. But I am sure that such an idea cannot be originally yours."

"I beg your pardon. What reason have I to think anything else?" said Mr. Lennard.

"Why, Uncle Lennard," exclaimed Will more naturally, "you can't think that I—that I could encourage your men in anything against you! I'll go now, if you like, and tell them what fools they are."

"No, thank you. Your arguments might not have much weight, if you were to take my side of the question."

There was a moment's silence. Then Mr. Perrott spoke again, with additional dignity and deepness of tone, to show that he felt Will's words to him quite unworthy of notice.

"I have been very much pained several times lately, by the marks of disaffection and ill feeling that I have seen among the quarrymen. My son agrees with me. He has always had a bad opinion of them, and particu-

larly of James Archer, by whom Mr. Thorpe was not unnaturally taken in. Such a return as this, for all that has been done for them, stamps them of course as thoroughly unworthy objects. Unfortunate, very!" and Mr. Perrott sighed.

"Very well, Perrott; but what is to be done?" said the Squire. "They will not get another shilling from me, and so you may tell them. I wonder at their insolence—no—I wonder that I was not more prepared for it."

"There will be some difficulty," said Mr. Perrott, looking pensively on the ground, "in bringing them to a sense of their condition. They feel secure, of course. With their new houses and their indulgent landlord, they have us at a disadvantage. We can't threaten them. Ah, I never thought that step a very wise one."

"But we can threaten them," said Mr. Lennard, striking his hand on the arm of his chair. "Now, Will, if you wish me to believe that you don't take these fellows' part against me, you will tell the whole rascally lot that unless they go to work as usual, without further nonsense, they will be turned out of your houses. There is a chance for you and them."

Standing there, with his uncle's eyes and Mr. Perrott's fixed upon him, Will knew that he had suddenly come to a crisis in his life. They did not seem inclined to give him any time for consideration. Mr. Lennard's face quivered with impatience, and his fingers clutched at the chair, while the agent stood waiting with his hat in his hand. Antigone, on the wall above, seemed to be waiting, too, in pale suspense.

"I don't feel myself justified in making such a threat as that," said Will, gravely and quietly. "It would mean ruin and starvation to all those women and children, for I don't believe the men would give in. If I were you, uncle Lennard, I should give them a small rise in wages; a compromise, at any rate. They are badly paid for these times."

Mr. Perrott groaned and shook his head.

"I did not ask for your advice," said Mr. Lennard, frowning. "You are a presuming boy, as ungrateful as the rest of them. I have had enough of this, and I give you your choice—your final choice, remember. If those fellows are obstinate, you promise me to turn them out of their houses—or you turn yourself out of my house—now—this morning, if you please. Take a few minutes to consider."

Will waited a moment before he made any answer, while consequences thronged upon his mind. This seemed like being sadly beaten in the battle of life, losing everything, failure all round. Circumstances crowding one upon another had brought him to this pass. In a strange inconsequent way his mind wandered off from his uncle's library to Lisa's salon in Paris, last May, and her voice came to him singing that quaint old French song—

"S'il gagne bataille
Aura mes amours;"

the words rang in his brain. On one side stood fortune, and a future of wealth and success—on the other, an untidy crowd of men, women, and children, and poverty. Will's vision did not go any further, or perhaps he would have reflected that a submissive answer to his uncle might in the end benefit them, as well as

himself. But the one question before him was,—I have made myself their friend—am I to give them up and desert them now?

"No amount of considering can make any difference," he said, looking at his uncle. "I can't give you that promise."

There was another pause. Will was sure that Mr. Perrott drew a long breath, as of relief. He glanced at him, but the agent was looking gravely on the floor, and Will turned his eyes away again, thinking that the old fellow was not worth being angry with.

"Then good morning to you," said Mr. Lennard, waving his hand. Will looked round, with a notion that his old straw hat might be somewhere in the room; but he did not see it, so he bowed his head slightly to his uncle, and walked straight out of the window, away across the park in its sunshine and dewy shadow, leaving Mallam House bare-headed, as he had entered it nearly a year before.

CHAPTER XVI.

A VISIT AT LUCAS'S.

"Smile and we smile, the lords of many lands;
Frown and we smile, the lords of our own hands;
For man is man and master of his fate."

TENNYSON.

THAT afternoon Julia Kenneth called at the Priory, and, as on a former occasion, found Clementina alone in the drawing-room. Her eyes were red, and she looked extremely miserable.

"All alone, Tiny!" said Julia. "Have they been bullying you again, you poor little mortal? Cheer up; I have brought you some good news."

"Oh," sighed Tiny, uncomforted, "Lotty is so disagreeable. You have not heard, then"——

At that moment Lotty came in. She certainly did not look pleasant, having an aspect of triumphant sulkiness. Julia shook hands with her, and looked at Tiny, not being sure whether she would choose to go on with what she was saying.

"You have heard the dreadful news, I suppose?" said Lotty. "Tiny thinks it so awful, but I'm inclined to think he brought it on himself."

"My dear Lotty, I have not the faintest idea what you are talking about," said Julia.

"What! I thought it was all over the country by this time. You have not heard that Mr. Thorpe quar-

relled with his uncle, and was turned out of the house this morning?"

Julia frowned incredulously.

"Is it true, Tiny?" she said.

"Should I have been likely to invent it?" said Lotty. "Oh yes, there is a regular scrimmage. The quarrymen have struck; you didn't know that, perhaps. I suppose he stood by them, but papa won't tell us much. At any rate he came into the village this morning, without even a hat—just fancy—and asked Mrs. Lucas if he could have a room there. Quite sensational, isn't it? He has been very foolish you know. Papa and Alfred always said he would come to grief some day, if he mixed himself up with those quarrymen. Mr. Lennard bore it for a long time, but he has lost patience at last, you see. It was rather a strong measure though, turning him out of the house."

Julia sat quite still. The colour had rushed into her face when Lotty began, but now she was pale.

"Tiny has been crying all day," Lotty continued, "which is weak of her, to say the least, considering what the consequences may be. I know somebody who would not be flattered if he could see her now."

Julia got up, and turned her eyes on Lotty, with a fierce glare in them, before which that young person quailed a little.

"Don't be more odious than you can help," she said, in a low voice which trembled a little. "Tiny has some good and lady-like feeling, but you have none. I wonder how you dare to sit there and triumph over a good man in his misfortune. I know enough of him to be quite certain that he is right, and his

uncle wrong. I cannot think how you can be so horrid."

"Well, really, Miss Julia!" began Lotty in an angry, mocking tone.

"Don't speak to me," said Julia. "Tiny, will you get a hat, and come out with me? You shall be back in half-an-hour or less."

"Good gracious! are you going to console him? How delightful for Tiny!" said Charlotte.

Julia did not answer. Tiny went obediently into the hall, took down her garden hat, and was ready to start at once.

Alfred came up as they were getting into the carriage, and Julia only acknowledged his smiling salutation by a very short nod, touched her pony with the whip, and dashed off at once.

"What's the meaning of this?" said Alfred, meeting Lotty in the hall.

"Only Will Thorpe's fiasco, which you will please to describe as a good man's misfortune," said Charlotte, laughing rather dismally. "I have got into terrible hot water by speaking of it lightly. She had not heard of it."

"What an awful idiot you are!" responded her brother. "Matthew is not such a certainty that you need disgust all Thorpe's friends by crowing and cackling like a barn-door fowl."

"Afred, how can you speak to me so coarsely!" said Lotty, beginning to cry in her turn.

Julia and Tiny were driving up the lane into the village. Tiny looked timidly up into her companion's face, and after a moment Julia looked at her.

"Go on, Tiny. I'm not savage with *you*," she said.

"You said there was some good news," Tiny ventured to suggest.

"So there is. I forgot. Will you be glad to see aunt Esther? She is coming to-morrow."

"Oh, how delightful! I feel as if she could make everything right."

"She has a talent that way, but I think this will be beyond her powers," said Julia. "Now, do you mind coming with me to Lucas's? I can't let that poor fellow think that he has no friends left in the world."

"Oh, I'll go anywhere you like," said Tiny, dreadfully frightened, but having sufficient confidence in Julia to be sure that she would not lead her into any serious scrape.

Mrs. Lucas came out in bustling amazement, as soon as Miss Kenneth pulled up under the clipped elms.

"Is Mr. Thorpe here, Mrs. Lucas?" said Julia in a loud, clear voice.

"Yes, Miss, he's here, safe enough," said Mrs. Lucas, her round face lengthened by torturing doubts, as she looked from one young lady to the other.

"Could he come out to speak to me, do you think?"

"Well, Miss, he's been shut up in his room all day, hasn't touched a morsel, and nobody's been near him," replied Mrs. Lucas discouragingly.

"Oh, very well, then he won't like to come out, of course," said Julia. "Let us go into your parlour, and tell him that I should be glad to speak to him there.

Shall we get out?" she said, turning with a faint smile to Tiny, who obeyed at once.

She had half expected to find Matthew with his cousin, and was a little disappointed. She wondered rather at this cool proceeding of Julia's, and when Mrs. Lucas had shown them into her lovely black-panelled parlour, with latticed windows looking out into a garden full of spring flowers, and had gone away to call Will, she ventured to murmur a small remonstrance.

"I beg your pardon, Julia—but do you think it is quite wise to have come here? People talk so."

"You are late, Tiny. Never mind. They won't talk about you; and I have given them plenty of subjects before this. Think of that poor fellow. I can't speak of it: it makes me too angry."

Tiny said no more. Two or three minutes passed, and then Will came into the room. He had conquered himself, and was half ashamed of the anger and agitation which had mastered him for all these hours. But he came in looking curiously changed, very pale and worn, though he smiled when he saw his visitors.

"What is going to become of you?" said Julia, abruptly. "You can't stay here."

Will walked to the window, and looked out dreamily into the garden.

"British Columbia," he said in a low voice.

"Oh, nonsense!"

"Yes, you are right," he said, turning round. "It will never do to run away. Stay here—oh, you mean in this house? I shall stay here for the present, till I see what comes of the strike. They will think me a queer sort of character if I go away and desert them

now, after making such a fuss with them all through the winter."

"It is very wrong of them to strike, isn't it?" said Tiny.

"I am not so sure of that."

"But how sorry they will be, when they know what has come of it!"

"Perhaps."

"Now don't mind speaking to us, because Tiny and I are your friends," said Julia in her deepest tones. "Forgive me for asking, have you quarrelled hopelessly with your uncle, or is it a small tiff that will be made up again?"

"No, it won't be made up again. At least, I shall not change my mind. We have parted finally, as far as I know. Did your father tell you about it, Miss Perrott?"

"No, not exactly. He said you had set yourself against Mr. Lennard, and so he was angry."

"All right. There is no use in going into particulars."

For a minute or two they were all three silent, Julia looking on the ground, Will out of the window, and Tiny's tearful eyes, full of sympathy, fixed on his downcast profile. Julia was the first to speak.

"Well," she said, "I know what my father would say, if he was here. So let me say it for him. My cart is at the door. Come back to Selbridge with me. We shall be glad to have you there as long as you like to stay. Aunt Esther is coming to-morrow, so you can have plenty of advice, if that will do you any good."

Julia coloured a little, and spoke even more shortly than usual.

"Thank you very much," said Will. "There are no kinder people in the world than you and Sir Thomas. But this is just what I can't do. I don't want to enrage my uncle any more—not for my own sake—and I think it certainly would enrage him, if I went to your house. I don't offend you, I hope, by saying so."

"On the contrary, truth is glorious," said Julia, getting up. "You know best, of course, though I think it will be wretched for you to stay here; but be sure to come to us for everything you want. I hope this horrible strike will soon be at an end."

"So do I, indeed," said Will. "I shall advise the men to give in, though I don't suppose they will. But perhaps my uncle may come to his senses and agree to a compromise. Good-bye: a thousand thanks for coming. Thank you too, Miss Perrott, very much; it was extremely kind of you. Is the carriage there?"

As they went out into the passage, they found it blocked up by something large and square, which two men were carrying in at the house-door. There was not much light in the narrow place, but their eyes caught a gleam of gilding, and Will signed to them to turn back for a moment into the parlour. He himself remained in the passage, and the two girls heard his voice speaking to the men.

"Is that you, Jem? Is it something of mine you have got there?"

"Yes, sir," said old Jacob's son, in low and awe-struck tones. "Beg pardon, sir, but the master, he

said we was to bring it. I've got the cart out there with a lot of things belonging to you."

"Very well," said Will with a strange cheerfulness. "Just turn in here with that, and then get out of the way; here are some ladies who want to come out."

Carefully and quietly the men carried the picture in, and set it down by Will's direction on two spindle-legged chairs. Against the background of dark polished wall, the Greek sun shone still more intensely, Polynices was more beautiful and calm, Antigone more sad. Jem glanced at Will, when he had set the picture down; the poor fellow wanted to show a little of his sorrow and sympathy, and kindly remembrance of those jolly ratting days in the barn; but Will was standing with his arms folded, gazing at the picture, and Jem had to shuffle unnoticed out of the room.

"Well, Tiny, we ought to be going," said Julia, after a minute of silence, during which her eyes wandered from the picture to Will's face, and back again.

"I beg your pardon," said Will, turning to them with a wonderfully bright smile. "You see I shall not be wretched or dull. I have a companion."

"A rather melancholy one," said Julia, feeling obliged to say something.

"Lively enough for me."

"Poor, poor fellow," said Julia, as she and Tiny drove away under the admiring eyes of Mr. and Mrs. Lucas and their satellites. "That delusion of his is the saddest part of it all. Dear me, Tiny, I do think this is the dismallest world. If I could only punish that uncle of his!"

"He bears it all so well," sighed Tiny. "Oh, I wish I could do something for him."

"All one can do is to stand by him, and not listen to a word against him."

"I wonder what Miss Dalbiac would say."

"It would decide her probably. She would see that her duty was to marry that distinguished cousin of hers; and she would be quite right. They would suit each other perfectly. Selfish, cold-hearted, worldly."

Tiny looked shocked, and Julia began to laugh at herself.

"Jump out, Tiny," she said, stopping at the corner of the Priory lane. "I must go home now. Good-bye, my little brick. You are quite worthy of any luck that comes in your way—that is one good thing."

"Oh, don't, please," said Tiny, getting out.

She stood and watched the carriage as it rolled away down the hill, and was then turning slowly towards home, when somebody came out of the corner churchyard gate, and stopped her.

CHAPTER XVII.

TINY'S ADVENTURE.

"Monseigneur m'estime bien davantage, depuis qu'il me croit riche."
BOILEAU.

"WHERE have you been with Miss Kenneth?" said Matthew.

He took the girl by both hands, and gazed earnestly into her face, his own softening, as it always did, under the happy trustful look of Tiny's eyes.

"Don't be vexed," she said softly. "You have heard, haven't you? I have been with her to see poor Mr. Thorpe."

"Why did she take you there? And why did she go herself? Rather an odd proceeding."

"Sir Thomas did not know," said Tiny, "or, of course, he would have gone. She went to ask him to come to Selbridge, but he says he must stay here. She could not go alone, so she took me. I was very glad," she said, looking up boldly; "I did not want him to think that we were all horrid enough to rejoice at his—at his misfortune."

"Very grandly said," Matthew answered, smiling. "You are rather singular though, Tina, if you don't rejoice."

"Oh!" said Tiny, starting with a sudden shock of disappointment, and colouring scarlet. "*You* are not glad?"

The tears sprang to her eyes, and he could see that the faintest suspicion of ungenerous joy in him,

her ideal and her hero, was a real pain to her little heart.

"Sentimental, romantic Tina!" he said in a low steady voice, looking at her. "Does she expect me to weep and tear my hair, because the man who stood more than anyone between me and the Mallam estate has done for himself? Is not that rather unreasonable?"

"I thought you—I did not think you could be glad," said Tiny, trying to pull her hands away. "Let me go home, please."

"Stay a minute. I have not spoken to you for a week. Let us walk a little way down the lane, and then you can go in through the copse."

Tiny took his arm and submitted; of course, she could not do anything else. The lane was quiet, sunk between deep banks tapestried with primroses, and not commanded by the Priory windows, which were hidden behind trees. They walked slowly down. Tiny did not feel inclined to speak any more, and could only listen to what Matthew said to her. He told her that he had been nearly all day in a distant part of the parish, and had heard no news till an hour or two ago, when on his way home Alfred had overtaken him, and had told him the whole story. Tiny began to feel happy again, as Matthew repeated it to her.

"Will seems to have behaved splendidly," he said. "I hope I should have done the same, and yet I don't know. People are not often so Quixotic now-a-days. I never knew a fellow who had less idea of taking care of number one."

"Ah, but you do admire it, and you are sorry for him," said Tiny, quite reassured.

"Yes, Tina. I like Will, and I wish I could do

anything for him. But my interference, certainly, would do no good."

"I wonder if I might tell you an idea that has come into my head. You will call it Quixotic, perhaps. I dare not do anything without telling you, but if you don't object—oh, I should be so happy."

"Let me hear it, then," said Matthew, smiling.

Then Tiny suddenly became eloquent. Matthew listened to her, at first half disapproving, but gradually won over by her generous arguments. He looked at the small face, flushed and lighted up with a new spirit, and thought it beautiful, priding himself on the discernment which had shown him, from the beginning, that Tiny was anything but a commonplace girl. They soon left the lane for the copse, and spent a happy half-hour there in the shade. Matthew had never before felt so large-hearted and unworldly, and Tiny, whatever her thoughts might always have been, had never spoken them with such undoubting fearlessness.

"You are a dear, brave little girl," said Matthew, at last. "You shall do what you like, and I am sure that nothing but good can come of it."

"Oh, you don't know how delightful it is to hear you say that," said Tiny, gratefully.

Suddenly this little Eden was invaded by no less a person than Mr. Perrott, who emerged from a cross path, and stood in paternal majesty before the lovers. For a moment no one spoke. Matthew dropped Tiny's hand, and descended from the sublime and sentimental to his chronic state of bitterness.

"I know I ought not to be here," he said, frowning and colouring.

"No, Matthew, you ought not," said Mr. Perrott, rubbing his hands. "I heard voices, and had my suspicions, so I thought it best to step this way at once."

"Certainly. Pray understand that the fault is entirely mine. Good evening."

Tiny looked imploringly at her father. Mr. Perrott raised his finger and beckoned to the curate with an impressive air.

"Wait a minute, if you please. As I grow older, month by month—we all do—one lesson imprints itself on my mind. It is this:—Remember your own youth, and do not be severe on the young. I have been coming round for some time to the conviction that it is no use to oppose these things with too much obstinacy. I have talked it over with Mrs. Perrott, and she agrees with me. Therefore, Matthew, if you are in no great hurry, and if you have no more agreeable engagement, will you dine with us this evening?"

"Oh! dear papa!" cried Tiny, seizing her father's hand.

He patted her cheek, and smiled at Matthew.

But that young man's behaviour was not quite what might have been expected. He looked sadly at Tiny, and then, as he met Mr. Perrott's eyes, a strange smile curled the corners of his mouth.

"You are very kind," he said, "but I have another engagement. I am going to spend the evening with my cousin, Will Thorpe, at the inn, or else get him to spend it with me."

Mr. Perrott's face fell, and so did Tiny's; but neither of them could utter a word of persuasion. Matthew shook hands with them, and turned back into the copse.

"How are we to understand this, Tiny?" said her

father. "Has Mr. Mat Lennard seen fit to change his mind? Really the young men of the present day are past all comprehension."

"Changed his mind, papa! What do you mean?"

"I mean, my dear, is he the same to you as ever? What can induce him to slight my advances, to decline my invitation!"

"Of course he is the same. As if he could change!" said Tiny, with indignation. "Why, we might have known that he would not come to dinner to-night. He has not seen poor Mr. Thorpe yet. Ask him to-morrow, and I daresay he will come."

"Hum! I don't know. We shall see," said Mr. Perrott. "A word of advice, Tiny. We won't mention this little event indoors. Your mother might misunderstand his motives. It would not be pleasant for you."

Tiny sighed. "I'm sure I don't want to mention it, papa," she said.

Mr. Perrott's forbearance was rewarded, about half past five the next day, by Matthew's calling at the Priory and boldly asking if Tiny could come out for a walk with him. Mrs. Perrott consented rather stiffly, the operation of turning completely round on her axis being not quite so easy to her as to her husband.

Just as they were setting off, Mr. Perrott came out of his study, and called Matthew back for a moment.

"You have such a generous heart, my dear Matthew," he said, "that I hardly think my news will afford you unmixed pleasure. That poor foolish cousin of yours has indeed done for himself. Mr. Lennard is going to destroy his will."

"I am not generous," said Matthew. "The only man among us who has any claim to that quality is

the fellow we are driving out. He has not made it pay—not yet, at least—one never knows what may happen."

"Do you call that soft-hearted carelessness generosity? I don't," said Mr. Perrott, with moral dignity. "But I will not detain you. I wish you a pleasant walk."

A few minutes later, Matthew and Tiny had slipped into the park at a side gate, and were hurrying along under the trees, by the footpath which had first brought Will to Mallam House. Tiny's little nervous fears were all gone, and she talked away brightly to Matthew as he walked beside her. He was rather grave and pre-occupied, half amused at himself, sometimes half angry and inclined to despise himself for letting that foolish Tina originate and carry out such an idea as this. At other times he felt as if it was the only right and possible course. Thus torn within himself, he was not a very agreeable companion, but Tiny found no fault with him.

The way was unfamiliar to them both, up and down those grassy glades lit up with the evening sun. They passed out of the park into the shrubbery, and under the yew hedge, then suddenly finding themselves close to the house. There rose the massive brown walls, deep in the shadow of great evergreens, and of the rugged trunks and branches of the still leafless elms. The two young people stopped involuntarily and looked at it. A gloomy, ghostly old place, far too large for its few inmates and silent as the grave. If there were any birds, they did not sing; none of the sounds of noisy spring had found their way there.

"I wonder Mr. Thorpe could live here so long,"

whispered Tiny, as they stood hidden under a yew tree, a dozen yards from the house-wall. "Isn't it awful?"

"My father lived here when he was a boy, and was happy enough," answered Matthew, who was gazing at the home of his family with the same sort of hard resentful longing that had been in his face when he looked down on its roof from the church-tower.

"There were more people here then. I suppose it is the stillness that frightens one so," said Tiny.

"Are you frightened, Tina, dear? Remember, you are not bound to go any further."

"Oh no, not frightened in that way. What can hurt me? I wonder if the servants will let me in."

"Look here," said Matthew. "I believe these nearest windows are the library, where he generally sits. And see, that far one is open. If you are not afraid, you might go straight in there. There would be one great advantage in doing that. I should be here within call. If you were to be frightened, and to scream, I should be with you instantly. In fact, you would feel that I was watching you from outside. What do you say, Tina?"

"Yes; I will go in there," said Tiny.

She had given his hand a little parting squeeze, and was gone, before he had time to speak again. Something odd rose in Matthew's throat and nearly choked him. A ridiculous dimness, too, came over his eyes, so that he could not see at first what she was doing. However, it was, at any rate, impossible to see into the room from where he stood, and he dared not venture any nearer.

Clementina stood a moment on the stone threshold

of the window, looking along the length of the library. Though it was only beginning to be evening out-of-doors, twilight was already there. At the end of a vista of heavy chairs and tables, and bookcases projecting into the room, she saw a man sitting near a smouldering fire. His head, leaning on one side, was supported on his right hand. Tiny stepped noiselessly down from the stone sill on the red carpet inside. At the same moment a black dog, lying at his master's feet on the hearth-rug, lifted his head and began to growl, so that she saw she must at once announce her presence. She raised her hand and tapped sharply on the window; then, as the dog ran forward, and his master started and looked round, she thought of Matthew outside, and closed the window to prevent the dog's discovering him.

Then, very quietly, this shy and timid girl walked a few steps forward into the room. Mr. Lennard rose slowly from his chair, and stood with his hand on the back of it, gazing at her. The silence was terrible, and Tiny felt that she must break it. Yet it was so difficult, a great deal more difficult than she had expected, to speak to this man, who she perceived to be a tall and handsome likeness of Matthew, and who looked so grave and so much astonished at the sight of his visitor. He saved her the effort of speaking first, after all.

"What has brought me this pleasure?" he said, in a low melancholy voice. "And I am not sure that I have the honour of knowing you."

"Oh! I am Clementina Perrott," said Tiny, trembling all over. "I beg your pardon for not going

round to the front door, but I thought perhaps your servants would not let me in."

"You were quite right. I am ill, and Jacob would probably have admitted no one but your father. He has been here this afternoon. Pray sit down, Miss Perrott."

He moved his hand towards a chair, and Tiny seated herself, watching him with wistful imploring eyes as he let himself fell again, wearily, into his own seat.

"I am very sorry you are ill," she said. "Papa did not tell us."

"It is an old complaint, not worth talking of—a mind preying upon itself. I have other queer symptoms too. I cannot keep myself awake, which is a curious thing, as I live in such a lively place. Does it not strike you as particularly cheerful?"

He looked into the fire as he spoke, and Tiny answered gravely,—

"No, I think it is a dreadfully sad place. I don't wonder that you are ill."

Then there was a pause—perfect stillness, except that a cinder fell out of the grate.

"You came to inquire for me. Very good of you," said Mr. Lennard presently.

"No, indeed. I did not know that you were ill," Tiny hastened to reply. "I came to ask a favour."

"A favour—of me?" said Mr. Lennard, glancing round with a faint smile, which reassured her wonderfully. "I can do nothing for anybody. I am perfectly useless and shall continue so. I know, however, what you have come to ask."

"Oh, do you really, Mr. Lennard?" said Tiny.

"Yes. I remember all about you now. You would be engaged to Matthew Lennard if his prospects were anything respectable. You naturally want me to make another will, and leave my property to him. Don't you think it is a good deal to ask?"

"I am not quite such a horrid greedy girl as you seem to think," said Tiny, blushing with indignation. "I am engaged to him, whatever his prospects are,—but I don't want you to leave him the property—nor does he. I came here to ask you not to alter your will. Nobody has spoken for Mr. Thorpe, and I thought I must. He is so good and brave, and I think you ought to respect him for not giving those people up. Oh, do forgive him, and let him come back again. Everybody is so sorry."

"Is everybody so sorry? Did he ask you to speak for him?"

"No, no, of course not."

"Miss Perrott, excuse my offering you a word of advice. I believe you are disinterested; you have done what only a woman could do—more than that, there is only one woman in the world whom I could have imagined doing it. But never attempt again to interfere between relations. My nephew had his free choice. He chose to leave me, after behaving to me with an ingratitude which might have surprised some people. That is enough. We part friends. I understand and admire your motive."

He got up and stood on the hearth-rug, looking at Tiny with a smile. His quiet, gentle manner, and the sweetness of his expression, emboldened her to make one more attempt. After all, this eccentric hermit was not a wild beast.

"It is very kind of you to say that," she said; "but I did not come entirely of myself. I asked Matthew, and he was quite willing."

"Was he? Generous Matthew!" said Mr. Lennard. "Courageous, too, to trust you alone in the bear's cage. And you were not afraid?"

"Yes, I was, rather," said Tiny. "Everybody is a little afraid of you, I think."

"I suppose so. And yet I am human, you see, like the rest of them."

"Mr. Thorpe was very fond of you," said Tiny. "He used to talk about you a great deal. Oh, please, please, don't alter your will."

She got up, pressing her hands together, and looking at him imploringly. Something in her manner affected him strangely, and he made an impatient movement.

"What nonsense! Why do you torment me? My dear girl, you are too late—not that it would have made any difference. The will is destroyed. I burnt it half-an-hour ago."

"Oh!" sighed Tiny—"how dreadful! Well, if you make another, and leave Mallam to any one but Mr. Thorpe, I think you will be very unjust. Please forgive me. I don't mean to be rude."

"On the contrary, I must ask you to forgive me, for being obliged to refuse your generous request. And did you find your way across the park alone?"

"No," said Tiny, much confused. "Mr. Matthew Lennard came with me. He is outside."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Lennard. "Then I need not offer to walk home with you. Your father, I suppose, has consented to the engagement."

"Yes, I think he has," said Tiny.

"Probably. Mr. Perrott is one of the most terrible men I know. He takes his tide at the flood. You don't quite see my meaning. Never mind. Good-bye. I am sorry you are disappointed."

He walked along the room to the window, and opened it for her. She noticed that there was a curious feebleness and stiffness in his limbs, which made him walk slowly and uneasily. She looked up at him, as he stood by the window, and held out her hand. The Squire took it, that strange look of impatience passing over his face again, and held it while she stepped over the sill.

Matthew saw her come out, and then saw his uncle's unfamiliar head appear at the window. He stepped forward from the shade of the yew tree, and took off his hat, for he felt it impossible to skulk unseen about the house. Mr. Lennard answered by a slight nod, and drew back instantly.

Tiny returned to her lover in such a state of nervous distress that it was some minutes before they were able to set off on their walk home.

And to this day Matthew has not a very clear idea of what happened that evening in the library. He only refers to this little episode in their lives as "the day when Tina fell in love with my uncle."

CHAPTER XVIII.

PRINTED AND WRITTEN.

"So I, who strove to you I may not earn,
Methinks, am come unto so high a place,
That though from thence I can but vainly yearn
For that averted favour of your face,
I shall not turn."

AUSTIN DOBSON.

MATTHEW and Clementina kept the attempt at intercession to themselves, and for a few days Mallam was in suspense, not being able to persuade itself that Will had really lost his place, and that the quarrel with his uncle would not sooner or later be made up. But it leaked out through the Priory channel that Mr. Lennard had burnt his will, and though nobody could be sure what, after all, would become of the property, no reasonable person could help confessing that Matthew was the favourite.

A good many of the village people, who had worshipped Will Thorpe for his prospects, as well as for his pleasant ways, now discovered that young Mr. Lennard was the real thing,—there was no humbug about him—and it would have been a pity for the estate to go out of the old name.

But at Lucas's, the focus of village gossip and the head-quarters of opinion, Will's popularity increased after his downfall. Mrs. Lucas, having established the fallen hero in her best room, could not help taking a romantic interest in him. She had been one of

Matthew's warmest supporters, but now, as she justly remarked, he could do without her. She had always disliked "they Perrotts," though, to be sure, Miss Tiny was a long way the nicest of them. But her heart was chiefly touched by the way in which Mr. Thorpe put himself into her hands as to lodging and food, as well as by the quiet cheerfulness with which he bore his misfortune.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Lucas, "you should have heard him asking of me whether I'd any objections to his knocking nails into the wall and hanging up some pictures; and he's got some uncommon pretty ones. There's one of three girls fast asleep in a sort of an orchard, as he's hung by the fireplace. I never saw the room look half so smart before, and so I told him. The big one's going to stay down in the parlour. I told him perhaps we shouldn't get it upstairs without knocking the corners off. And as to they quarrymen, if it's all along of them striking that his uncle's quarrelled with him, I do say as they ought to be ashamed of theirselves."

Mrs. Lucas highly approved of the behaviour of Sir Thomas and Miss Kenneth, who were constantly driving over to see Will or inquire after him. They did not often see him, for he spent a good deal of his time at the Long Croft, talking to Archer, and trying to persuade him and his fellow-workmen to make up with the Squire, and to be satisfied for the present with what had been already done for them; but Archer did not like this idea at all, and took Will's arguments very coolly. He was inclined to hold out to the last, and quietly told Will that the women had a notion there was somebody who would not let them and their

children starve; and Will, foolish fellow, had not strength of mind to answer sternly that they would have to reap the consequences of their own actions.

One afternoon Julia Kenneth drove to Mallam with her aunt, who had arrived from London, and stopped at the inn. Will was out, but Mrs. Lucas came to speak to them, dropping a deep curtsey to Esther, who was an object of mysterious interest in the village. They asked a few questions about Mr. Thorpe—how he was, and so on.

"Well, ma'am," said Mrs. Lucas, looking rather grave, "he's less cheerful to-day than I've seen him since the day he first come. Don't you mention it, please ma'am—I'm telling you because you and Sir Thomas has been kind friends to the poor young gentleman—but when I went in this morning to fetch away his breakfast"—in a confidentially lowered tone —"he'd scarcely touched a thing, though the new-laid eggs was the finest I've seen this year. I opened the door gently, and he didn't hear me at first, I suppose —anyhow there was his letters and the newspaper crumpled up in front of him, and he with his head and his arms down upon them, just as if he was in a faint. I *was* scared, and I hooted—I couldn't help it, ma'am, indeed—and then he looked up and smiled, and shoved his things away. 'It's nothing, Mrs. Lucas,' he says, 'only a little bad news,' and somehow I didn't like to ask no questions."

"Bad news! what could it be?" said Julia. "Did he go out soon after breakfast?"

"Yes, ma'am, and has never come in since. I hope it weren't curious, but I went and looked about the room to see if I could find the paper. But it wasn't

nowhere to be seen. I couldn't help noticing, though, when I took them in to him, that one of his letters had the postmark of St. George's. My sister Mary, that's with the young lady at St. George's Palace, writes to me with the same postmark, you know, ma'am."

Julia stared at her pony's ears.

"If Mr. Thorpe comes in in pretty good time," said Esther, not taking any notice of this information, "will you ask him to come and see us at Selbridge this evening. I shall not be here long, and I am anxious to see him."

Mrs. Lucas promised to give the message. She was anxious to do all she could to further the Kenneth connection, which seemed to her the most hopeful thing in the world for the recovery of Mr. Thorpe's fallen fortunes. It also made a pleasant subject for her frequent letters to her sister Mary.

Will went to Selbridge Court between eight and nine that evening. Sir Thomas had not yet left the dining-room, but the ladies were sitting in the drawing-room with open windows, and no light but the flicker of a small fire. It had been one of those hot days that sometimes come in April. When Will came in, the butler lighted two candles on the mantelpiece.

"I hope you don't dislike twilight," said Esther, as she shook hands with Will. "I am glad of it, for the sake of my eyes, so I am kindly indulged, you see."

She had not seen Will since that day in the autumn, when he had called on his way to Paris, and the change in him struck her very painfully. She tried to talk a little on indifferent subjects, and Julia chimed in, but they were both conscious of the trouble that weighed on his frank open brow, and clouded his pleasant eyes.

Even his voice was sad and low, and his whole manner was that of a person defeated and disappointed. Esther looked at him sorrowfully, and he, presently meeting her eyes, smiled and said, "I suppose you have heard the story of my smash, Miss Kenneth. Perhaps you wonder, as other people do, that I have not gone away yet. But I do want to see the end of this strike first."

Esther was glad that the ice was broken. She began to talk at once, and Will listened silently, while Julia half turned away and sat with her face to the open window, looking out.

There was something in Miss Kenneth's sympathy —many people had experienced it before Will—which made it more valuable than that of ordinary natures. It was an intuition, an understanding, a power of putting herself into another person's place, divining his thoughts, seeing with his eyes, and then laying a soft soothing hand on all that was painful. Perhaps this sympathy is seldom found in very fortunate people, whose hearts are occupied with loves and interests of their own.

Will did as Miss Kenneth wished, and told her the story of his work and his failure. She was touched and pleased by the gentleness with which he spoke of his uncle. Perrott, he said, and honestly thought, was chiefly accountable for the quarrel; but it was not one to be easily made up.

"I think you were quite right," said Esther. "You could have done nothing else. But do you know that I am reproaching myself very sadly."

"Why?" said Will, wondering.

"I am afraid I said too much to you, last summer,

about treating your uncle like other people. He is odd, of course, and since I knew him—the long solitude—his character may have changed very much; because I should never have believed that he would have listened to Mr. Perrott against you."

"Nor should I, a few months ago," said Will. "He has changed lately, I think; but it is a horrid muddle altogether. If only this business was settled, I would be off, and Mallam need never hear of me again. I meant to do good, and I have only done mischief. I suppose it is always the way."

"No one ever really tried to do good, without its being good in the end. That I firmly believe," said Esther; "and I do not myself think that you have seen the last of your uncle. He will know by and by that you were right."

"I hope not. I mean, I hope he won't take the trouble to make his will over again," said Will, with a dismal smile. "I should like to shake hands with him once more, for I must tell you that, though he was trying sometimes, one could not help getting fond of him. But I can't really care for anything, since the post came this morning."

"What did it bring you?" said Esther.

There was no curiosity, but a world of kindness and friendship, in the question. Will pulled out a newspaper, and Esther looked up into his eyes with a startled anxiety as he gave it to her. Julia glanced over her shoulder, and then stared out of the window again.

"You can't see. I must fetch you a light," said Will.

He walked across to the fireplace, took one of the

candles and brought it to her, standing and holding it in a perfectly firm hand. He stooped and pointed to a corner of the paper.

"The Burnbridge Herald," he said. "I don't know how it got in there."

Esther could hardly have explained her own feelings as she read:—

"We understand that a marriage is arranged between the Earl of Fareham and Miss Dalbiac, only daughter of the late Colonel and Lady Elizabeth Dalbiac, and grand-daughter of Henry, eighth Earl of Fareham."

"But this is not certain," said Esther in a low voice.

"I have not shown you all yet. Look at this letter. I once paid some money to oblige Colonel Dalbiac, but how these people came to know of it I cannot imagine."

Then Julia got up suddenly from her chair by the window, and came forward, her cheeks burning and her eyes bright with excitement.

"May I see too?" she said, rather hoarsely.

Esther glanced at Will, and gave Julia the paper. She herself took the letter that he was holding out to her.

"Lady Anne Corbet presents her compliments to Mr. Thorpe, and begs to enclose a cheque for £500. She understands that he lent this sum to her brother-in-law, Colonel Dalbiac, shortly before his death. The debt has only come to her knowledge within the last few days: she therefore hopes that Mr. Thorpe will accept her apologies for the unintentional delay."

"Mr. Thorpe, listen to me. I have something to confess to you," said Julia.

Will raised his eyes in a sort of dreamy wonder. His feeling was that nothing mattered much now. Lady Anne's note had writing between the lines, visible to his eyes, to Esther's, even to Julia's, which made it a perfect confirmation of the report in the newspaper. It said that Lisa belonged to Lord Fareham now; she was to have nothing more to say to Will; she would not even write him a line of farewell.

Julia told him her story without any faltering. Will heard it with a strange calmness; it had more effect on Esther than on him. She watched the two young people with a painful interest, Julia struggling with an excitement that she vainly tried to hide, Will, passive and enduring, bowing his head a little when she stopped speaking.

"Oh, thank you," he said. "Well, I wondered how they came to know. Of course Lord Fareham told them. One gets to understand it all by degrees."

He slowly folded up the paper and the letter, and then wished them good-night. Esther looked sorrowfully after him as he left the room.

"If there was anything one could do!" she sighed to herself.

"Did not I tell you, Aunt Esther?" said Julia, beginning to march fiercely up and down. "Now you see I was right. She did not care for him. She is heartless, as I said."

CHAPTER XIX.

LADY ANNE'S PERPLEXITY.

"Youth
Too long, alas, hast thou starved on the ruth,
The bitterness of love: too long indeed,
Seeing thou art so gentle."

KEATS.

"HAVE you heard the news about Mr. Thorpe, ma'am?" Lady Anne's maid Rachel said to Miss Dalbiac, who had come into the room where she was working.

Lisa turned round with a start and faced her, standing with her hand upon the door. Rachel looked at her gravely, noticing the anxiety, the sudden quiver of drooping eyelashes.

"No," said Lisa, after a moment's silence. "What is it? and how did you come to hear it, Rachel?"

"That sister of Mary's, who is always writing to her. Mary gave me the letter, ma'am. She did not quite like to show it to you herself, but she consulted me, and I thought you might wish to see it. Here it is. Won't you sit down, Miss Lisa?"

Lisa took no notice of this invitation, but remained standing, and frowned a little over Mrs. Lucas's closely written sheet. That good woman's intention was better than her performance; her writing and spelling dated from a day when education was not fashionable. But she had a good deal of native genius, and the letter was wonderfully well expressed. It contained a clear

and full history of the strike at the quarries, of Mr. Thorpe's being turned out by his uncle, of his life at the inn, of the goodness of Sir Thomas and Miss Kenneth. If Mr. Thorpe's marriage with Miss Kenneth was not a settled thing, Mrs. Lucas's opinion was that it ought to be. Selbridge Court was more home to him than anywhere. Many people were quite sure that they were already engaged, but Mrs. Lucas refused to be positive on this point, till she heard it from himself or some friend of his; but she thought it very likely. It had been plain enough all the winter, as to him and Miss Julia, that one could do nothing without the other; and she was sure she thought it was a very good thing. The letter might, by careful study, be interpreted and condensed thus.

"I expect that Miss Kenneth must be niece to the one that came here?" suggested Rachel, who, in her quiet dignified way, was not averse to a little gossip.

"Yes, she is," said Lisa. "Thank you, Rachel."

She quietly returned the letter, and walked out of the room.

And now the truth was that she found herself in a difficulty. She was not inclined to write to Will, or to act at all on information received in this way, though she felt sorry for him in his failure and disappointment. She did not know what to do. She wondered that he had not written to her—but a very possible explanation flashed upon her directly. The constant intercourse with Julia Kenneth, who, no doubt, had her good qualities, and could make herself pleasant enough to any one she liked, as she evidently liked Will, might, through all these months, have had its effect upon him. It was not unnatural. He was not a very strong-minded

man. He had vanity, which, no doubt, these people had flattered. And if the loss of his uncle's favour, which destroyed his prospects in life, made no difference to them, of course this marriage was the best thing that could happen for him, poor fellow. Lisa had often told herself this before, but never with quite so much confidence. She felt almost sure that the woman in her letter was right, and she quite forgave him, and understood that he did not like to write to her. Poor Will—after all, it was the fulfilment of her own prophecy. She thought she would wait a few days, and then, perhaps, write to him, and ask him to tell her his plans. They need not cease to be friends, because he had made a mistake once in his life.

Then she remembered that Lord Fareham was coming to lunch with her and her aunt that day, so she smoothed back some small soft curls that were apt to escape and wander where they chose, and went into the drawing-room, quite inclined for a pleasant afternoon. Nobody was there, not even Puff. She took up the third volume of a novel that she was reading, which had interested her so much the day before that she could hardly lay it down, and going to her favourite spring seat by the flowers in the corner window, began to read. But it was a strange thing that she read a whole page without having the faintest idea what was printed on it, began it again with the same result, and finally put the book down in despair. It seemed as if her brain would not obey her eyes. So she clasped her hands together, and sat looking out of the window till Lady Anne came in.

She, too, had heard the news, and she glanced a little anxiously at her niece in consequence. But Lisa

got up and came forward at once, beginning to talk about a picture that she had finished the day before, with such quiet ease and calmness that Lady Anne was reassured, and did her best to banish the obnoxious Thorpe from her mind.

It was only a day or two before this that Lord Fareham, having returned from his Scotch estates, had escaped, in the midst of his numberless engagements, to pay her a visit. Lisa was in town at her studio, and he was not very sorry, for he wished to talk to her aunt about the debt, and how it was to be paid. Lady Anne was quite sure that her niece did not know of it, and equally sure that she could not pay it, without selling some of her mother's diamonds. Of course, Lady Anne said, if Lisa knew it, she would insist on doing that at once. The form in which this idea presented itself to them both—that of the future Lady Fareham being obliged to part with her jewellery for such a purpose—was equally dreadful to both minds.

Lady Anne herself was by no means rich, but she decided at once to pay the money without a word to Lisa. Then Spenser very gravely, and with a little hesitation, begged her to allow him to advance it, but Lady Anne smiled and shook her head.

"Thank you very much, but that is quite impossible," she said.

"Why? I am sorry you think so. It seems to me a most natural arrangement."

"It would not be fair to Lisa, you understand. But at present, at any rate, she shall know nothing about the debt. There we quite agree."

"You are very good to us both," said Lord Fareham.

So this was how Will's debt was paid, by a little plot between Lisa Dalbiac's aunt and cousin.

Whatever the inconvenience to herself, Lady Anne could not dream of putting her niece under an unconscious obligation to Lord Fareham. She would have felt this under any circumstances, but especially in the present uncertainty as to whether this hoped-for marriage would ever come off. Sometimes she really believed in it, and then was frightened by some word or look of Lisa's. As to Spenser, he seemed perfectly secure, and was only waiting till he had got safely through the mass of business consequent on his uncle's death, to put himself beyond all doubt. He felt that he had great influence with Lisa, who liked talking to him, and received all his ideas with a respect which, from her, seemed the most charming flattery. So Lady Anne watched and hoped.

That afternoon, she was glad that the soft spring sunshine tempted the two young people out into the garden. She was in some pain that day, and had it not been for Spenser's coming, would hardly have left her room. She had been obliged to exert herself, however, and was now resting on the sofa in her peaceful drawing-room, quite alone, Puff having condescended to go out for a waddle on the terraces behind his younger friends. Lady Anne was thinking of Lisa, in her large drooping hat, as she had come to her before going out, and of Spenser, grave and happy in the background, his eyes fixed on his graceful cousin with an admiring affection which Lady Anne thought Lisa could not help seeing.

Never was a couple so well matched, she thought. Lisa as Lady Fareham would be the most fortunate

woman in the world, married to a man distinguished by his high character and talent, even more than by his position. And he might have searched Europe through without finding a woman better fitted than Lisa Dalbiac to rule his house, and to take the place that his wife must hold in society. The arrangement was simply perfect, and now it seemed as if the only possible obstacle was to be removed by that young Thorpe's engagement to his neighbour Miss Kenneth.

Lady Anne lay with her eyes closed, restfully meditating.

Then Rachel opened the door very gently, and came to her with a card.

"Dear me, Rachel, who is it?" said Lady Anne. "I meant to have told you that I would not see anybody."

"Mr. William Thorpe, if you please, my lady."

Lady Anne started up on her sofa.

"To see me? I really don't think I can. Did he ask for me?"

"Yes," Rachel said, "he had asked for Lady Anne Corbet and Miss Dalbiac."

"What a very strange thing!"

Rachel looked perfectly solemn and unconscious. "Shall I say your ladyship is not well enough to see him, and Miss Dalbiac is out?"

"Well—no, thank you, Rachel—I think I will see him. Tell him I shall be happy to see him, if you please."

When Will came in, Lady Anne was sitting on her sofa, and rose to receive him. He bowed, and she kindly stretched out her hand. What the troublesome

young man had come for, she could not imagine, but it was a satisfaction to her curiosity to see him.

He asked after Miss Dalbiac, and she said she was quite well, but unfortunately gone out walking.

"She will be sorry to have missed an old friend, I am sure," said Lady Anne graciously. "You and your uncle took care of her so kindly all the way from Paris. I have often wished to thank you."

Will smiled. Lady Anne looked at him, and found it impossible to dislike him as she could have wished. He was very good-looking, she thought. Perhaps he interested her and touched her fancy more now than he would have done in his brighter days. His manner was very quiet and sad, but without a trace of peevish complaining; his eyes looked worn and hollow, and he stooped wearily forward as he sat.

He answered one or two of her questions, and then looked at her steadily, trying, as it seemed, to see his fate in that soft, amiable countenance.

"I am sorry," he said slowly, "that you thought it necessary to send that money."

"Could we have done anything else, when it came to our knowledge?" said Lady Anne, with a little reproving gravity.

"Oh, I suppose not. Was she vexed about it—Lisa—Miss Dalbiac, I mean? Was she angry that I had never mentioned it to her?

"I wrote to you, Mr. Thorpe," said Lady Anne, colouring slightly.

"I know—yes. Miss Kenneth told your friend, Lord Fareham. I never meant you to know. I hope you don't mind my asking if Miss Dalbiac was vexed with me."

There was something that rather frightened Lady Anne, who was not used to tragedy, in the solemnity of Will's manner, the pauses between his words, the intense yet half dreamy earnestness with which he spoke. With his sad questioning eyes fixed upon her, she found it impossible not to tell him all the truth. It was quite a new experience to be driven into a corner like this, and yet she could not feel angry, or denounce Will as less than a gentleman for his extreme seriousness.

"If you are so very anxious to know what my niece thinks," she said gently, "I must confess to you that at present she knows nothing about it. I am her proper guardian, you know, her nearest relation. I preferred that the matter should be settled without her knowledge."

"You did not want her to feel herself under any obligation to me?" said Will. "I don't think you need have minded that. She has known me long enough. However, of course you did as you thought best."

"No, that was not my reason," said Lady Anne. "I hope neither she nor I would ever be ashamed of being obliged to our friends. I am very grateful to you for your generous consideration. I think, do you know, that your reason for saying nothing last autumn must have been the same as mine is now."

Lady Anne said this in a low voice, looking earnestly at Will. He leaned his head on his hand, with a slight frown of wonder and mystification.

"Pray forgive me," he said. "I feel rather stupid."

"No doubt you knew something of Colonel Dalbiac's affairs," Lady Anne went on, gently; "and you knew that it would be a trouble to her to pay this debt—

would involve parting with some things she valued—so you said nothing about it. You were very good and kind, but of course, as you must see yourself, quite the wrong person to bear her burdens. Well, you will have no difficulty in understanding that she is now no richer than she was then; but she belongs to me, and I take her affairs into my hands. Let us say no more about it."

Will remained silent for a few moments, his head bent, his eyes fixed on the carpet. Lady Anne watched him, and thought regretfully that all this was not very like an engagement to somebody else. Troubles in this quarter were not over, evidently; but she was too soft-hearted for her own peace, and was filled with amiable pity for the disappointment of this nice-looking young man.

"Of course you are quite right," said Will, raising his eyes. "I am not the person to have anything to do with her affairs. I know it is all too late now, but may I ask if she has ever said much to you about me?"

He looked at her anxiously, and yet there was a calmness in his face, a quiet resolution which told her that he was quite master of himself, and that she might safely say anything she thought well. No desperation, however deep and strong was his hopeless love. He was a boy no longer, but a man who knew how to rule his spirit.

His words sounded to Lady Anne like a farewell, and she began to think how she could give him a little comfort in his banishment.

"I asked her, and she told me *all* about you," she said gravely. "She esteems you very highly. I am

sure she has felt your attachment to her very much—she could do nothing else. But you know"—Lady Anne blushed and hesitated—"it is not always in one's own power—"

"Oh no," said Will. "She always told me that something like this might happen. I hope she will be happy—and she won't quite forget—"

He got up and stood still, gazing out across the court at the red clock-tower as it rose against the blue.

"Have you ever seen this old palace before?" said Lady Anne, looking at him curiously, a little puzzled by the form of this renunciation.

"No. I may as well tell you that anyhow I should have been done for. I should have had to say good-bye to her—to any hope there might have been. All my affairs have come to smash, do you know," he said, looking at Lisa's aunt with a quiet sadness which touched her heart. "My uncle was going to leave me his estate, but he has changed his mind. Things went wrong—we could not agree. Altogether I should not be in a position now to ask her; but I need not bore you by talking about it."

"You don't bore me at all. I am very sorry for you," said Lady Anne.

Will did not know how little accustomed she was to have her sympathy appealed to, and how her many friends made a point of never telling her anything sad or unpleasant.

"I am very sorry indeed," she repeated. "I had heard a report of some difference between you and your uncle. I hope it may be made right again."

"That is not likely," said Will. "Thank you. Good-bye."

"Wait one moment," said Lady Anne. "Do not let me offend you by what I am going to say—but one thing that Lisa told me distressed me very much—her loss of that ring of yours. Forgive me—I am an old woman—will you do me the pleasure of accepting this? It is not of any great value, but it would make both her and me happy to think that you had it. Will you take it as a little sign of our regard—and pray do not let us lose sight of you."

Lady Anne was quite nervous: she blushed and smiled, and her eyes were soft with earnest kindness as she looked at Will. She took off one of the diamond rings she wore, and held it out to him. He coloured too, and smiled, but made no movement to take it.

"Pray forgive me," he said. "You are most kind, but I could not take it. The other was not my ring—she knows—it was hers—I gave it to her."

"Then, if I must be disappointed," said Lady Anne, "I can only say good-bye, and God bless you."

Then Will did a strange thing, for an Englishman. As Lady Anne gave him her hand, he bent down and touched it with his lips. Then he looked at her with a sort of entreaty.

"Will you say good-bye to her for me?"

"I don't quite know," hesitated Lady Anne, "but if you like to find her, she and Lord Fareham may be somewhere in the garden."

"Thank you. I should like to see her once again," said Will. "I won't be a bore to them."

"I am sure you will not," said Lady Anne.

When he was gone she lay down again, shut her eyes, and took herself to task. How could she have allowed herself to take such a fancy to Spenser's rival!

And she was almost obliged to confess that if Mr. Thorpe's circumstances had been the least hopeful, she would have trembled for Spenser. Indeed she did not wonder at all that Lisa had said of Will. "Poor fellow! he is certainly charming!" said Lady Anne, as she lay and thought about her visitor.

CHAPTER XX.

GOODBYE.

"Chinava a terra il bel guardo gentile,
E tacendo dicea (com' a me parve):
Chi m' allontana il mio fedele amico!"
PETRARCH.

LORD FAREHAM and his cousin were standing by a sun-dial on one of the broad terraces of the palace garden. They were quite occupied with each other. The afternoon sun was shining on them, and throwing soft tender shadows of budding trees on the mossy pavement and the shaven grass. Puff had lain down in a sunny place to wait till they chose to pursue their walk.

Will, coming along the terrace in the distance, saw them standing there and half paused. In all his life he had never felt so far from Lisa as he did then, and it was a little startling to find that till this moment he had not realised the meaning of that paragraph in the county paper. Now that he saw the two together, Lord Fareham talking earnestly, Miss Dalbiac smiling as she listened, with something gently acquiescent in her manner that he had never seen before, he knew that he was come to say good-bye. There came a feeling that he could not go through it, that he must turn back and walk quietly away.

"A coward!" said Will to himself. "Then you never deserved her, and she is well rid of you."

And the next moment the choice was taken away, for Puff saw him, and came barking to meet him. There was nothing for it but to go forward and confront those two. It was easy enough when it came to the point, as things generally are.

"Will! what brings you here?" said Lisa, holding out her hand, and Lord Fareham came forward, too, with an easy friendliness which made Will feel as if he was plunged in ice, and yet brought a rush of angry colour to his face.

Lisa saw it, and as she met his eyes, could not help blushing and looking down, with a conviction that all gossiping reports from Mallam were entirely false. As to Will, he felt for a moment as if he could not speak, but he conquered himself, and said quietly, "Oh, nothing particular. I called at the Palace, and your aunt told me I might come and look for you in the garden. It was only to say good-bye. We are not likely to meet again."

"Are you going abroad?" said Lisa in a low voice.

"I daresay I shall, soon. The Mallam affair has come to grief—I shall go to Australia or British Columbia. I don't exactly know where, yet. Can you give me any advice?" said Will, looking at Lord Fareham.

"British Columbia! I have some friends out there. Much the most hopeful," answered Spenser. "You could not do better, I should think. The very place for a man who means to work."

"Yes. Well out of the way of everybody," said Will.

Lisa made an effort to speak, feeling that Lord Fareham was looking at her in a little surprise.

"What a pity that you and your uncle should have disagreed: Is it really a hopeless quarrel?"

"Quite, I think," said Will. "But for some things it is just as well. There are people who are best away in the wilds. They can't do any good in England. They are born to make a mess of everything. But I did not want to bore you with my affairs. I must be off, and I only meant to say good-bye, and to tell you—you know—you always have my good wishes."

He held out his hand, and as she gave him hers they looked at each other. Will could not trust himself to say any more, and Lisa could not quite understand the look in his eyes, renunciation, hopelessness, a sad reproach, the farewell of a love that had to be conquered and lived down. She, too, looked at him a little reproachfully. If the Kenneth story was all nothing, she could not see that the loss of Will's prospects in life need have led to this sudden giving up of all the hopes he had talked of so long. Without any explanation, too! What had she done to deserve this? But there was only a little wonder in her eyes as she wished her lover good-bye, smiling rather sadly, and told him he must let them know what became of him.

So Will walked away along the terrace, not looking back, and Lord Fareham, after studying the sun-dial for a moment, asked Lisa if she was tired, and would like to go in.

"No," she said. "I am not at all tired, thank you. Shall we walk on? You were telling me about

your Scotch tenants. How very nice the Scotch seem to be!"

"The highest and lowest of them are the most charming people in the world," said Lord Fareham; "and if Mr. Thorpe makes up his mind to go to British Columbia, I have a Scotch friend out there to whom I should like to introduce him. Do you know —the idea may seem to his friends rather dismal— but he could not possibly do better than go out there. It would do him all the good in the world. In that fine, free, healthy life he would soon recover from English disappointments—crotchety uncles and so on. He is a nice fellow. I should like to hear of his doing well."

"I hope he will do well. I think so," said Lisa.

She was pleased with Spenser for speaking so kindly of Will, whose manner to him had been rather cool. Her cousin certainly had no foolish little jealousies about him. His kindness and good temper made him a very pleasant companion, and in gratitude to him she tried to be cheerful, and to forget the strange sadness of that glimpse of Will.

CHAPTER XXI.

DARKER SHADOWS.

"The looks and smiles I gained from you
Were little more than others won,
And yet you are not wholly true,
Nor wholly just what you have done."
LORD HOUGHTON.

WILL had never known anything like the feeling of desolation which went back with him from St. George's Palace to Mallam.

It was true that he had gone up to town, telling himself that it was to say good-bye to Lisa, to see her perhaps for the last time; but he knew now that underneath that knowledge a faint hope had been allowed to hide itself, a fancy that after all there might have been some mistake. That hope had only died when he saw Lisa standing with her cousin by the sun-dial on the terrace, in the sweet April sunshine, with spring flowers blooming round her, and a quiet content in her face.

Of course it was all right: it was much better for her; it was only what he might have expected all along. She had warned him that it might happen some day, and he had no right to be surprised. All his sensations were numbed somehow, by his great loss; only a throb of pain now and then reminded him that he was alive and suffering.

And these keener feelings, to do Will entire justice, were not of self-pity. They were caused by a thought, which would push itself into his mind in spite of him,

that perhaps, altogether, in this affair, Lisa had not behaved quite well.

Surely, after all he had said to her, with all her knowledge of him and his love, she might have told him herself of this engagement. Will could not help feeling this, and yet was angry with himself. It made him doubly wretched, for even a worse thing than the loss of all hope of winning his ideal was any shade on the beauty of her character and the perfection of her ways.

He was afraid that he had let her see the thoughts in his mind, for she had looked at him sadly and questioningly, as if asking what he meant. Perhaps she had written to him, and the letter had been lost. Perhaps she had not had time to write, and she could not know how soon the news of her engagement would reach him, or that he would appear suddenly at St. George's, without being sent for or expected. Well, however it might have been, she was gone, and Will must fight his losing battle without any hope to cheer him through it.

When he got back Mrs. Lucas's kind heart was shocked at his appearance; those two days seemed to have taken away all his youth and life, and to have added years to his age. She wondered where in the world he had been, but of course could not ask. He said nothing, and did not even show any interest when she told him that Sir Thomas and Miss Julia Kenneth had been that day to inquire for him. She brought him his dinner, on which she had exerted all her skill, but he would eat scarcely anything, and they heard him walking about in his room for hours that night.

He came down-stairs about nine the next morning,

and went out of the house. Mrs. Lucas rushed to the door after him.

"Stop a minute, please sir. Surely you're not going off without your breakfast. I'll have it ready in five minutes. Now, do stop, and let those blessed men alone. It would serve them right if you never went near them no more."

Will stopped and turned round, answering her with a weary impatience that was quite new to him.

"Don't trouble yourself, Mrs. Lucas. I don't want any breakfast. I wish you would not think about me."

"Dear heart alive, and who's to help that, when you look as ill as any one can, and won't take a bit of care of yourself, nor let nobody else neither."

Mrs. Lucas's lamentations died away into an indistinct grumbling. Will nodded to her and walked on.

The Long Croft houses looked cheerful enough as he approached them across the fields. The morning sun was shining full on their smart new fronts, one or two men were working in the gardens, and some little boys were playing in the road. The spring walk, with all its sweet sights and sounds, had braced Will up and done him some good. He stopped to speak to the children as he walked down the road, and Joe Penn told him that his brother Phil was "bad."

"What's the matter with him?"

"The fever," answered a chorus of three or four voices.

So, instead of going straight to Archer's house, Will walked in at Mrs. Penn's gate, to see for himself what was really the matter with Phil. The fever it was, sure enough, the old enemy of the quarry children, a low, wasting, wearying illness, that had brought down little Phil in a few hours, from the wildest and sturdiest

mischief to a state of moaning suffering, hot, miserable, almost delirious, and crying out continually about the pain in his head.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Penn, as she held her big boy in her arms, and rocked him to and fro, "we thought you was gone, and we shouldn't see no more of you. Small blame to him, I says, and some o' them said 'twere a good riddance, but I didn't say that. Ay, it's the old fever. I've buried four on 'em, and now I shall bury him, and he won't be the worse off, I expect. Don't my arms just ache with holding him! He's not a baby, you see, isn't Phil, and he won't lie in bed. Well, my master's gone for the doctor, but what's the use? Don't I know as they're all took the same, and them as is took goes. I can't say what brought it on, sir—these here damp new houses, maybe. It's a bad job for us, what with this strike. Seems like everything coming at once, as it were."

"Does nobody come in to help you, Mrs. Penn? None of your neighbours?" said Will, standing in the middle of the kitchen, and looking down at the mother's coarse worn face, and the flushed cheeks and tumbled hair of the restless child in her arms.

"They would if I asked 'em," said Mrs. Penn. "It ain't the way with our folks, not to help each other. But the fever's a different thing. Them as has little children of their own ain't likely to come near the fever, till they're druv to it. Nay, I must get on alone. It won't last many days—poor little chap."

Her rough voice faltered a little. She looked at the boy, and went on rocking him backwards and forwards. Will came near and stooped over her.

"Give him to me," he said. "I'll hold him a little,

and you can rest. He is a good weight, a big fellow like that."

"He is, sure enough. Bless you, get along. What do you know about holding 'em!" said Mrs. Penn, smiling slightly at the absurd proposal.

"We shall see," said Will. "I can manage. Now, Phil!"

He lifted the child out of his mother's arms, and began walking up and down the room. She watched him anxiously for a minute or two, but was soon reassured, seeing that he held him safely and easily, and that the wild head seemed to rest comfortably on his shoulder. Then she went about some of her household business, and Will presently sat down. Phil became gradually quieter; he and his new nurse quite understood each other.

Perhaps Will sat there for half-an-hour; Mrs. Penn went in and out, and now and then the other children came peeping round the door. It was like a sort of dream; there seemed to be nothing strange in it; nothing could be more natural and ordinary than to sit nursing the sick child. What did it matter how one employed one's self, or what sort of figure one cut? In this world the only thing seemed to be to walk on as if one only saw a few inches before one, and just to do whatever came nearest and pushed itself into the way.

Presently a man's step came up the garden. Will looked up and saw Archer standing in the doorway. There was a slight smile on his face, as he stared at Will and saw his new occupation. Will looked at him rather oddly for a moment, almost as if he did not know him. Then he smiled and nodded to him.

"I'm coming to see you directly, Archer," he said. "I was holding this fellow for a few minutes, while his mother did her work. I am very sorry to find this fever; we don't seem to be out of our troubles yet."

"No, sir," said Archer. "You haven't brought us any better news?"

Mrs. Penn came in at the moment and relieved Will of his charge, with a few rough words of thanks. Will went out with Archer into the garden, and drew a long breath of fresh air.

"The Squire won't give in, I suppose, sir?" said Archer, looking at him curiously.

"Give in about your pay? He never will. You need not expect it; I told you so. I have not seen him again, you know, but I feel sure of it. How long do you mean to hold out? that is the question."

"Well, sir, you might ask us that question all round, and you would not find one to answer it. We haven't set ourselves a limit, and that's about the truth. If there's no more to be done in this country, we must take ourselves off in time. It's a bad business, but one must stand by the principle of the thing. However, I've not lost hope yet, in spite of what you may say. You'll excuse me, Mr. Thorpe, but it seems to me that you wanted a little more patience with the Squire. It's beyond me to discover what good you expected to do by enraging him up to this point, and breaking off with him. Spoilt your own chance and not improved ours —that's about it, I think."

"Why, what do you mean?" said Will rather dreamily. "Don't you know——"

"Yes, sir, I know all about it," said Archer. "You never told me; I'll say that for you. It was a very

fine motive, and we're all obliged to you, I'm sure; but it's been a bad business for us all along. Here we are off Mr. Lennard's ground—and it's natural he shouldn't take the same interest in us. And you being our landlord, his quarrelling with you makes him all the bitterer against us—that's natural, too. I won't say you've not behaved to us like a gentleman, because you have, and you know very well that your name's a household word among us. But the best of us will make mistakes sometimes, and if by any fair means you could have kept in with the Squire, it would have been better for yourself and for us too. Now I don't know what's to become of us all. I candidly tell you I don't. You're our landlord, and you'll see us through it somehow, I suppose,—but it's a bad business altogether. Perhaps it might have been as well for us if we'd been contented, and made the best of it. Now I rather guess we're all ruined together."

Archer had been looking away across the fields as he made this long speech, but at the end of it he raised his eyes to Will's face. They were standing together by Mrs. Penn's garden gate. The young landlord was very pale, and was gazing vacantly into the blue distance, almost as if he did not hear. Archer thought, however, that he had stung him effectually; he had never seen him look like that before, in all their different talks together. Archer was a thorough utilitarian at heart, and the more he thought about this business, the more he felt angry with Will, and despised him for having been so easily led into this quarrel with his uncle, the results of which must be bad for everybody. Mr. Alfred Perrott had made a few laughing remarks on the subject one day, and

Archer could not help agreeing with him. He was mistaken, however, if he thought that his contribution to Will's trouble of mind was more than the extra drop which made the cup overflow. Will heard him, certainly, and had a dim sense that this was ingratitude, and that he might have expected it all along. But it made very little difference to him now. He stood quite silent for a minute, and then repeated Archer's last words.

"All ruined together. We had better go out and found a colony. Good day. If you want me, you know where to find me."

"Poor fellow! I could always have told you he was a trifle too soft," said Archer, half to himself and half to three very small Penns, as he watched Will walking rather slowly away, and turning into the fields on his way back to Mallam.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIRE.

"Et, rougissant les toits comme une sombre aurore,
Semble en son vol joyeux danser sur leurs débris."

VICTOR HUGO.

NOBODY ever knew how it all happened. Between twelve and one that night the people at Lucas's were waked by a violent knocking at the house door, and cries of "Fire!"

Lucas rushed to the window, while Will Thorpe, who had been sitting up in his room, ran downstairs. They heard that the fire was at the Long Croft houses, and that these people were going to fetch Sir Thomas Kenneth's engine. Will shouted to Lucas to make haste and come along, and ran on down the village to call Matthew, Joe Nash, and a few of the other young men. It was a warm dark night, with a high wind, which drove great black masses of clouds across the sky; now and then there came a break, and between the clouds and from far beyond them two or three stars looked out of their dark blue depths. As Matthew, Will, and Joe, in advance of the others, were hurrying across the fields, Will looked up at one of these sudden glimpses of the infinite.

"The stars make one feel as if nothing mattered, don't they?" he said.

"They don't matter to us, certainly, nor we to them," said Matthew, "not in this existence, at least. I

never had much turn for star-gazing. It is apt to lead men into bogs."

Joe Nash thought this very clever, and ventured a laugh. Will did not laugh, however. But the stars were forgotten as they mounted a rising ground, and saw the red lurid light, which had before been faintly and strangely reflected on the clouds, suffusing all the horizon. They could even see black roofs and chimney pots against a background of light glowing smoke, with red flames shooting up and dying down again. The wind fanned the flame, and carried showers of sparks away on its wings. The young men were soon on the spot, and there the scene was wild indeed. The two or three centre houses of the row were on fire; from one of them flames were bursting out at the door and windows, so that all the Long Croft, and the road, and the opposite rocks were lighted up with a flickering red radiance, in which black figures ran wildly about, half-dressed women and children crouched and cried, or worked desperately at the still untouched houses, dragging out furniture, throwing things recklessly from the upper windows, screaming, talking, running against each other. A few men, with Archer at their head, were bringing buckets of water, and dashing them on the flames, but these only seemed to shoot up more furiously.

For the next half-hour Will and his companions worked harder than any one there. As soon as people saw him, they came running to him for orders, and his cousin Matthew was not so taken up with his own work as not to notice that all Will's old life and spirit seemed to have come back to him again. There was a bright red colour in his face, which was not all the

glare of the fire, and wherever people wanted him there he was,—carrying buckets, climbing up ladders to the burning house-fronts, drenching the roofs and walls of the next houses, to give them a little chance of escape.

Once he disappeared for a few minutes; he had picked up Phil Penn, who was lying on a mattress by the roadside, and carried him off to one of the old houses in the lane, leaving him under the care of a frightened young woman who had not seemed capable of anything but staring and screaming.

The Selbridge fire-engine, with a great many people running behind it, came rattling down the road. One of the men riding on it was Alfred Perrott, and under his quick directions streams of water were soon shooting on the flames. But the wind blew, and the fire blazed more and more furiously.

Will stood still a moment in one of the trampled gardens, and looked at his winter's work; but he could not think or realise anything. Then he heard a voice calling to him.

"Mr. Thorpe! here! help! get a ladder!"

He looked up and saw Archer on the nearest roof.

Part of it had suddenly fallen in, and a great cloud of smoke and flame rushed up through the opening. Archer was clinging to a chimney, and beckoning wildly with his hand.

Will had a ladder almost instantly against the front of the house—it was one that had been burning longest—and standing on the lowest round, looked up and shouted—"Now—mind where you go!"

He saw Archer standing black against the flame,

which seemed to burst out just then more violently than ever. Some other voices from behind gave a shout—"Look out there!"

Then Archer's voice answered them in a sort of shriek—"Oh, I can't see!"

The fire seemed to make a great sweep forward, driven by the wind. Will sprang up the ladder, calling out, "Here! Archer, Archer!" Then he did not know what was happening; there was a sudden confusion of flames and falling bricks all round him; the ladder gave a sharp crack under him—he put out his hands to save himself, and did not see any more of the fire at the Long Croft.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AFTER THE FIRE.

"Ever, he said, that close and near
A lady's voice was in his ear,
And that the priest he could not hear
For that she ever sung,
'In the lost battle, borne down by the flying,
Where mingles war's rattle with groans of the dying!'
So the notes rung."

MARMION.

THE next day was Sunday, but there was no chiming of the Mallam bells. Many of the people, perhaps in consequence of this, found it impossible to go to church, and spent their day staring at the smoking and smouldering ruins of the Long Croft houses, or venturing as near as they dared to the old inn in the village, in dread all the time of being driven away by a sudden sally of Mrs. Lucas in her anger and grief. Archer had escaped with a few trifling burns and scratches; but the clever doctor from Burnbridge shook his head over Mr. Thorpe's case, and said there was no knowing how it might end. There were no bones broken, only some very severe bruises, but what the doctor feared most was serious injury to the head, and he was made more anxious by Will's being very feverish and excited, talking incessantly, trying to get up, and only falling back again when he found he was too stiff to move. It was by no means easy to keep him perfectly quiet, as the doctor wished. He had come to himself early in the morning, but seemed to

have lost all memory of the fire. He never alluded to it, at least.

As the hours went on his head ached violently, and he became more and more feverish, looking up without any recognition in his eyes into Esther Kenneth's face, as she bent over him and laid her hand on his fore-head. She had come over to Mallam that morning with her brother and Julia, and after a glance at Will and a few words with the doctor, she turned to Sir Thomas and told him, in the quiet voice which meant a resolution, that she was going to stay at the inn and nurse Mr. Thorpe.

"But, my dear, have you strength for it?" said Sir Thomas anxiously.

"Don't hinder her, papa," said Julia, from the back-ground. "Thank you, aunt Esther."

Sir Thomas took an opportunity of explaining to Mrs. Lucas that his friend Mr. Thorpe was in his charge, but that his vexation at its being impossible to remove him to Selbridge was very much lessened by his being under her roof. He felt sure that he would have every attention, and that the house would be kept perfectly quiet. Mrs. Lucas dried her eyes and told him he was not mistaken. Then Sir Thomas took Julia away to church, and left Esther with her patient.

The two rooms in the house on which Mrs. Lucas prided herself most were the parlour and a bedroom opening into it, which was always kept as a sort of state-room. The inn had been kept by Lucases for several generations, and these rooms were furnished with heirlooms. The posts of the bed were carved in

oak to match the panelling, and the curtains and counterpane were of ancient and artistic patchwork. The chairs had needlework cushions let into their solid frames, and the walls were ornamented with samplers and pictures in cross-stitch. Like the parlour, the bedroom had a long low latticed window, looking out into the garden at the back. Green leaves, and spikes of red japonica lay across the small diamond panes, which were polished to the same brightness as everything else in the room. Will had been carried into this room in the early morning, when they brought him back from the Long Croft, and Mrs. Lucas had at once decided that he had better not be dragged upstairs; he might stay there and welcome, and she only wished it was better for his sake, poor dear young gentleman. So Will lay in the quaint old bed, and his friends went in and out of the parlour with careful steps and hushed voices all through that weary morning. At one time in the afternoon he was a little quieter: the doctor was gone, and as Esther sat in an arm-chair beside him, she almost wondered at the peace and stillness of everything. It was during the time of afternoon service; and besides the singing and twittering of birds in the garden, there seemed to be a faint echo of the organ, stealing through some open window in the church, and making its way to her over trees and roofs. She hardly knew how it was, but these gentle sounds, this old room with its quaint ornaments, made her feel young again. If it had not been that Theresa Lennard's son lay there under her eyes, she could scarcely have believed in the flight of time. How quiet he was! She rose and looked at him, hoping to find him asleep, but he gazed at her with open eyes and a distressed

frown, and cried out in a sharp sad voice, "It's lost. I've lost it!"

"It will come back to you," said Esther gently.

"But I did want to win it, and I've lost it, and she is gone too. A marriage is arranged. Let us know what becomes of you. Oh, you said you would wait a year—and you never told me—you never told me. Lisa, Lisa, Lisa!"

"Lie still, my dear," said Esther, as he suddenly tried to raise himself.

"Will, what brings you here? Did you say it? Was it you? You won't look at me now. Beaten—failed—the battle is lost—and I'd rather die. Let me die, Lisa, please. Is that your hand—how cool it is! You have not been fighting like me."

Esther found that the best way of quieting him was to lay her hand on his burning forehead. She had the gift of healing in a very great measure, and the power of her cool soft hands, and of the gentleness which hid so much strength, had often been wondered at by doctors and nurses, who could hardly understand how Miss Kenneth managed their patients so much more easily than they did themselves.

As she stood by Will's pillow, Esther did not feel very hopeful about him, however. The distress of mind which poured itself out in his delirious talk was likely to hinder his recovery much more than burns and bruises, she thought. How was this poor brain to be quieted? Miss Dalbiac's story was mysterious, and it seemed to Esther that she had not behaved quite well to Will. A very peculiar girl, thought Esther. She did not believe she was really cold-hearted, and yet she seemed to have no great affec-

tion for anything but her painting. However, of course it was no use thinking about her; she was engaged to Lord Fareham, and could have nothing more to do with Will.

"Poor Will!" said Esther to herself: "is yours to be another of these lonely lives?"

He was much quieter now, and seemed to be sinking into a kind of sleepy state. Esther presently withdrew her hand, and sat down again. Then she heard the parlour door open gently. Mrs. Lucas came forward and peeped into the bedroom, turning round hastily to some one who was following her.

"Hush, please sir! I do believe he's asleep."

"Let me go in," said a low, peremptory voice.

Mrs. Lucas could only give an apologetic glance at Esther, who rose suddenly, and was standing in the shadow of the curtains when Mr. Lennard walked into the room. He stopped short when he saw her, and bowed gravely.

"I beg your pardon. No one told me that you were here."

His uncle's voice roused and startled the invalid.

"Lisa!" he cried out. "Did you hear that? Where are you? Why are you gone away? You will never come back again. It's done, it's all gone. The battle must be fought, and then it is lost; and then why can't you let me die? You are so cruel, and you smile and smile—and I won't turn them out. British Columbia—see, see, the ship is on fire. Lisa, Lisa!"

This went on for some time, while Mr. Lennard stood with his arms folded at the foot of the bed, and Esther and Mrs. Lucas did all they could to quiet Will. Esther was thankful that she had to exert her-

self, and to remember that there were more troubles than hers in the world; those few minutes gave her back the power over herself, which had seemed to desert her suddenly at the tones of her old lover's voice, and his unlooked-for appearance in the room. After all, after so many years, she, of course, could be nothing to him; and this was not the John Lennard to whom she had kept her faith all this time. He, with all his strangeness of temper, had been warm-hearted, affectionate, and honourable; this seemed to be a man of no feeling, living only for his own selfish whims, and not even able to understand honour and generosity in other people.

There he stood and looked on, and thought his thoughts about her. Was this really Esther Kenneth, the young, beautiful, distinguished, high-spirited woman who once realised his idea of what a woman ought to be! The effect upon him had been very startling as he entered the room and saw her standing there in the shadow, with all her old grace and dignity, with a faint colour in her cheeks, and a slight frown troubling the eyes which had a blue light in them, as they used to have sometimes when she was angry—for Esther had taught herself much patience since those days.

At last she signed to Mrs. Lucas to stay with Will, and went forward into the parlour, where Mr. Lennard followed her mechanically. She stood with her hand on one of the old chairs, and looked at him, that light still shining in her quiet eyes.

"He does not know you," she said. "He knows no one; and he is in great distress of mind, as you hear. I don't know how it will end."

"And you are with him?" said Mr. Lennard.

"Yes. The doctor does not think so seriously of the hurts and bruises he had last night, as of this fever. He is afraid, too, of some injury to the head. There might be brain fever—but I trust it will not come to that."

"Foolish fellow, to get himself into such a scrape," said Mr. Lennard, with an attempt at his careless manner.

"Is it all his own doing, do you think?" said Esther.

"He might have been more reasonable. It is a good thing for him that he has some friends left. You won't care for my thanks, but you have them."

"I wonder most at his losing any friends," said Esther. "A generous character like his is more likely to make and keep them. He does seem, however, to be very much alone."

"Where is that young lady—Miss Dalbiac? Does she know of this affair?"

"I suppose not. But she has no more interest in him, poor fellow—that is his great trouble. She is engaged to her cousin, Lord Fareham."

"Indeed—poor Will—and so he wants to die. Not unnatural, under the circumstances. But are you sure it is true?"

"Our only authority was a paragraph in the paper; and I hear from Mrs. Lucas, whose sister is Miss Dalbiac's maid, that he went there two days ago, and came back in this sad state of mind. She had a letter from her sister this morning mentioning his visit."

"Can you show me the paper?"

Esther went to look among some of Will's things

which had been taken out of his pockets, and brought it to him at once. They stood side by side, and read it together. Mr. Lennard laughed, and Esther moved a yard or two away from him.

"What a fool of a world it is!" he said. "Yes, this looks very business-like, but it may be only gossip after all. There is the young lady's portrait, in that tragical picture of Will's. Does she look like giving up an old lover?"

They both looked across the room at the Antigone.

"No," said Esther. "Yet I am afraid—other things have made me think that this is only too likely to be true."

"Well, it may be best for him in the end, if we can pull him through this illness."

He paused, and they stood silent for a moment or two.

"You are very good," he said in a gentler voice, "to interest yourself in waifs and strays."

"That is hardly a description of Mr. Thorpe," said Esther.

"No; a suffering hero, I suppose. You take his part entirely, do you not? You never feel any wish to hear the other side of the story?"

"I have nothing to do with his private affairs, and I am not curious about them. I believe in him, and I am sorry for him—that is all I know," answered Esther, quietly. "I think I hear him moving, I must go back to him now."

"Don't let me keep you. Is there anything I can do or send?"

"Nothing, thank you," said Esther.

She gravely returned his bow, and went back into Will's room without saying any more.

As Mr. Lennard left the house, he met a number of people at the door. There were Sir Thomas Kenneth, Julia, Mr. Perrott, Tiny, and Matthew, all coming to inquire for Will. A good many of the congregation, just come out of church, were straggling in the road, to catch something of the last news.

The appearance of the Squire at Lucas's door was a great shock to all these people, and to Mr. Perrott as much as to any of them. He turned quite pale, and muttered "Amazing!" Mr. Lennard just touched his hat, and walked past without stopping or speaking.

"Oh, I am so glad!" sighed Tiny.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LORD FAREHAM'S RING.

"Si tu voulais, Madeleine,
Au lieu de la marjolaine,
Qui pare ton chaperon,
Tu porterais la couronne,
De comtesse ou de baronne,
Dont la perle est le fleuron!"

VICTOR HUGO.

THAT same April Sunday afternoon, Lord Fareham came to St. George's Palace, and found Lady Anne Corbet alone in her drawing-room. She was glad and yet disturbed at his coming, for she felt very anxious about Lisa, who during the last two days had been quite unable to hide her low spirits. Her aunt had been afraid to ask for her confidence, or to say much about Will, whose influence seemed to be so much greater than she had imagined, and who evidently was not engaged to any Miss Kenneth. Under the circumstances, it might have been better if Spenser had put off his visit for a few days, till things had regained their usual level of calm cheerfulness. It was terrible to Lady Anne to see Lisa, as she had appeared that morning, with a strange look about her eyes, and to hear from Kean that she did not believe her mistress had slept at all that night. Lady Anne sighed, and wondered what was the matter with all the young people; for even her dear Spenser was not himself. He looked pale and stern, was absent in his manner, forgot the

pretty speeches and attention that he generally bestowed on his old friend, walked tiresomely up and down the room, and in answer to her questions, muttered something about newspapers and unauthorised gossip. Then he turned round suddenly, and asked, "Where is Lisa?"

"She is gone to the afternoon service at the chapel," said Lady Anne. "It is nearly four o'clock; she will soon be in now."

"I shall go and meet her," said Lord Fareham, with his hand on the door.

There was great distress and anxiety in Lady Anne's gentle eyes. She stretched out her hand entreatingly.

"Stay a moment, Spenser. What is it?"

He paused and looked at her. "What do you mean?"

"Forgive me—I don't know—Lisa does not seem very well or happy."

"Does not she? That is all the more reason—you must trust me. I know what I am doing," he said, smiling.

"Very well. I do trust you," said Lady Anne, and she leaned back on her sofa with a sigh.

Lord Fareham went out across the court, and waited for his cousin at the foot of the chapel stairs. She soon came, descending the steps slowly and wearily; her long eyelashes were damp, and her cheeks paler than usual. Spenser could not quite understand her look when she saw him; the slight start, the sudden tinge of colour, might mean anything. He gave them their most hopeful meaning, and all the sternness was gone out of his face as he joined her.

Instead of going towards Lady Anne's rooms, they

turned out of the gateway, walked along the cloister, and made their way round into the gardens. But there was a certain constraint between them, and their talk had by no means the ease and pleasantness of a few days before. The clever, successful, fortunate Spenser Corbet felt quite a new diffidence of himself, and found the greatest difficulty in saying what had been in his mind all these months. Lisa Dalbiac, in the last forty-eight hours, had learnt something of her own true feelings, and could no longer be quite at ease with her cousin. The light had come, and it was painful to her eyes.

Lord Fareham stood still by a corner of mossy wall, where he and Lisa had often paused before to admire a soft undulating view of the park with its grand old trees, and a glimpse of the river in the distance. The birds were singing wonderfully that afternoon; they seemed to Lisa to be repeating the words of the choristers in the chapel, and thoughts came into her mind again which had flashed across it there, thoughts of truth to herself and to others, influences which, if her cousin had known it, were very unfavourable to him.

"I have something to say to you," he began, rather abruptly. "I want you to accept something from me —this ring—may I put it on your finger?"

One glance showed Lisa what the ring was. She coloured deeply, shook her head, and clasped her hands together.

"No—no, I could not—Thank you very, very much."

"No! Ah, well—you must not say no to me again, Lisa. You cannot, because everything that is mine is yours, if you will have it. I think you must have

understood me, dear Lisa, all this time. Will you make me the most fortunate man in the world? Will you be my wife? I will do my best to make you happy."

This was not an offer to be laughed at and put aside, like poor Will's last year. This was very serious indeed, and certainly Lisa felt no inclination to treat it lightly.

"Thank you," she said. "But you are so fortunate already, that I am sure you can do without me."

She said this gravely, glancing up into the dark earnest face beside her. She brought down upon herself a great many protestations. There was nothing worth living for but herself, and many assurances of the same kind. No doubt Lord Fareham meant them, every word, but somehow they failed of their effect. Perhaps he did himself harm by being a little too sure of success, taking her hand, and once more offering that unfortunate ring. Such speeches as this, too, jarred on Lisa's ears.

"Don't you know what pleasure it would give your aunt, to see you really in your right place?"

"It would not be my right place at all," said Lisa. "I don't think I shall ever marry. When I do, I shall know myself where duty and happiness go together—and that will be my right place. I am very sorry," she said, looking at her cousin with a sudden feeling for his disappointment. "You must not ask me. I could not, indeed. I know you are doing me a great honour, and I must seem very ungrateful. I am not that. You must forgive me, and understand."

Lord Fareham was dreadfully disturbed, and could hardly realise that he was refused. He felt angry with everybody—with Will Thorpe, whom he suspected of

being the original cause of this, with his absurd sentimental ways and looks—with Lady Anne, who might have warned him that her niece was set against him.

But here conscience stepped in, and reminded him that this very afternoon she had made an attempt at hinting something.

But what grieved and astonished him most was the troublesome foolishness of Lisa herself—what blindness, what fancifulness! She could not possibly have any real objection to him. Did any one ever hear of a man in his position, with all his advantages, personal and otherwise, being repulsed and set aside in this way? It was perfectly ridiculous—and then there was something that made it so very enraging. But he had plenty of self-command, and Lisa saw nothing of all these feelings.

"Well," he said, with an attempt at a smile, "you must try to forgive me for making myself disagreeable in this way. I ought to have seen—people are so unfortunately blind where themselves are concerned. But don't let me lose my dear cousin altogether. I hope the relationship will mean friendship always."

"Indeed, I hope so. You are very kind," said Lisa, rather sadly.

"Let us make that agreement. And now—once more—will you accept this ring? It has really been yours for a long time now. I have a fancy for it, and I should not like any one else to wear it. That day, do you know, when I saw you first, I had just bought it of old Gérard. He seemed quite attached to it himself, and unwilling to let me have it."

"I don't think I can take it from you," said Lisa, after a moment's pause, looking at the ring as he held

it, and then raising her eyes to his face with a faint smile, and yet a mist of tears that gathered suddenly. "If you knew what a trouble that ring has been to me!"

"Good heavens! was it yours?" exclaimed Lord Fareham, turning pale. "I remember, Gérard told me he had bought it that very day. Let me hear the whole story."

"There is not much to tell. I went into the shop as you left it, hoping to buy back the ring. It had been sold by mistake."

"How unfortunate! But I was quite innocent. You might have claimed your ring when you saw me. I remember telling you about it, that first evening."

"Yes, I remember very well," said Lisa, smiling.

"Then I think the discovery is very happily made. You will let me have the great pleasure of restoring your ring, and when you look at it, you will sometimes have a kind thought of an unfortunate fellow. There is no more doubt, is there?"

"Yes. Don't give it me yet. Its story goes further back still. It was not really mine. I had it to keep for a time—and it will be my duty, most likely, to send it back to its real owner. So you see I shall not wear it; and as it is yours now, I don't think I ought to take it from you."

But Lord Fareham was of a different opinion.

"You must accept it from me," he said, "and do whatever you like with it afterwards."

Perhaps it says something for the real depth of his character that he went back to town after his refusal without any feeling of anger against the person who had given his self-consciousness such a very deep

wound. One of the chief thoughts in his mind was—"At any rate, she does not know of that report, and probably never will. I must have it contradicted at once."

By the last post on Saturday evening he had received a copy of the Burnbridge Herald, directed to him in a disguised hand. After frowning and wondering over it for a short time, something occurred to him, and he rang for his valet.

"I think you told me once, Birch, that your brother-in-law was on the staff of a provincial paper."

"Yes, my lord," said the man, turning very red.

"Is it this—the 'Burnbridge Herald'?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Probably you can explain to me how this announcement of my being engaged to be married found its way into the paper."

Birch, in great confusion, began to offer the humblest apologies. He confessed that in writing to his brother-in-law he had mentioned the probability—and so on.

"They are always glad of any news from the fashionable world," murmured Birch.

"Very well. You will understand that I do not choose to be subject to impertinent gossip. You will leave me this day month. That will do."

But when Lord Fareham came back on Sunday evening from St. George's, he was in a softened frame of mind, and felt sorry to part with Birch, who, after all, was a faithful, useful fellow. So he rang for him again, and showed him a severe letter he had written to the editor of the paper, with the contradiction which was to be inserted. Birch was very submissive

and miserable. If his lordship could overlook the fault this once—nothing of the kind should ever happen again—he begged his pardon sincerely—and such a mistake, too!

"Yes. You won't forget it, I hope," said his master. "You have not only made a wrong use of my name, but of a lady's name, which is much more important. Fortunately Miss Dalbiac knows nothing about it, otherwise your apology ought to be made to her. However, the thing is done, and we will say no more. Only take care in future what you write to your brother-in-law."

Lord Fareham smiled a little as he ended, and Birch went away much comforted.

CHAPTER XXV.

NEWS FROM MALLAM.

"Down in yon garden sweet and gay
Where bonnie grows the lily,
I heard a fair maid sighing say
'My wish be wi' sweet Willy!'"

LADY ANNE was as nearly angry as she could be, when Lisa told her what had happened that afternoon.

"My dear," she said, "what can you have been thinking of! Oh, Lisa, I am indeed disappointed. What a foolish thing you have done! You will feel that some day, I am afraid. And how beautifully he behaved about the ring!"

Lisa could not very easily have told her aunt what she had been thinking of. It could not be confessed, even to herself.

But for many hours there was a constraint between them, and though on Monday morning Lady Anne repented herself, touched and grieved by her niece's pale weary looks, and became very affectionate, her kind loving speeches did not do Lisa much good. Even her aunt's kindness—and she did not know its extent—made her feel still more strongly that she was alone and poor, and that this one near relation of hers had a right to wonder at her so quietly putting aside all that was offered to her. But the past had taken quite a new shape in Lisa's mind, and she disliked the

thought of the future's copying it. Self, as she looked at it, was no longer so satisfactory, and was inclined to ask a bitter question—why should it ever have been indulged and admired, set up as a sort of model, as a superior prize to be worked for? what was its superiority? It seemed to vanish in this strange, painful, new light which was flooding everything.

In the afternoon, when Lisa was left alone in the drawing-room, she stood for a long time at the open window, thinking. What was to be done? That was the question. If she could only see Will again, her true, faithful old friend, if she could only ask him why he looked so strange, so unhappy and reproachful, in that flying visit last week. He certainly was very much changed; he must have felt the quarrel with his uncle very keenly, and the loss of all his bright prospects. Poor fellow! he looked broken down and disappointed; all his hopes seemed to have fled with his good fortune. He had failed in life so far, certainly—Lisa did not quite feel her own inconsistency—but was he obliged to give up everything without a word, because of that? His ring was in a corner of her work-basket: she took it out and looked at it.

"You must go back to him," she said.

Then she sat down to the piano, played a little, and presently began to sing. It was an old song that haunted her; the two last lines of it were these:—

"Qu'il gagne ou qu'il perde
Les aura toujours."

She started when the servant opened the door, and announced "Mr. Lennard."

He came in; a tall, slight man with dark grey hair, dark eyes, and a flush on his face which faded away

immediately. Lisa rose from the piano, blushing with much more confusion than she had felt yesterday, when Lord Fareham asked her to marry him. Mr. Lennard bowed with an easy grace that she could not help noticing, but his manner when he spoke was rather stiff and grave.

"You are Miss Dalbiac, I believe."

"Yes," said Lisa.

"I am John Lennard of Mallam, Will Thorpe's uncle. I lost patience with him the other day, and asked him to leave my house. He probably has told you all about it."

"He said very little about it when he was here last week," said Lisa. "Will you sit down."

"No, thank you. I have only a few words to say. And first, if I am making any serious mistake, I must ask you to forgive me. I have heard of you from Will. He has an enthusiastic mind, and may very likely have exaggerated any marks of friendliness you were good enough to show him. But I believe you have known him for some years?"

"We were neighbours at Bath. His father and mine were old friends," said Lisa.

He had seemed to wait for an answer, but she found some difficulty in speaking. She thought his manner so strange, and could not imagine what he would say next. A presentiment of evil had come into the room with him; she watched him with wide anxious eyes, quite forgetful of all her cool dignity.

"He has got himself into a sad scrape," said Mr. Lennard, looking at her with a curiosity and interest which he did not attempt to hide. "There was a fire on Saturday night at some cottages he has been build-

ing. Of course he was there, in the thick of it, and he was rather seriously hurt by the falling of a wall. No bones broken, I hear."

Lisa sat down on the nearest chair, stretching out her hands and clasping them together. She did not speak, but gazed at Will's uncle as if he was Fate herself.

"He has a good deal of fever," Mr. Lennard went on, "and spends most of his time in talking nonsense. The most hopeless feature of the case, as I understand it, is that he does not care what becomes of him—imagines, like many foolish disappointed boys before him, that there is nothing left for it but to die."

"Why does he not care what becomes of him?" said Lisa, in a voice quite unlike her own, harsh, and out of tune.

"You can surely answer that question. You are engaged to be married."

"I — engaged to be married" — repeated Lisa dreamily.

"And so I am aware that what I am going to ask you is quite unjustifiable, and will probably be refused. Well, I deserve it. Listen to me. Will talks of no one but you, calls you constantly, and is in great distress of mind about fighting, and losing a battle, or something of that kind. One knows what feverish fancies are, but they are generally founded on fact. I sent to ask this morning. He is worse, and the doctor says he can do nothing to quiet this distress of mind, which may very soon develop into brain fever."

Lisa had recovered herself a little while he spoke. When he paused, she got up, colouring crimson and looking on the floor.

"Before you ask me anything, let me ask you—may I go to him?"

"You have forestalled me," said Mr. Lennard. "I believe it is his only chance. He may know you, though he knows no one else. But though you are very kind and generous, we must remember that you are not a free agent. You have other people to consult."

"Only my aunt. She will let me go."

"But Lord Fareham"——

"What has Lord Fareham to do with me?"

"You are not engaged to him?"

"No. I am not engaged to any one. What can have made you think so? Does Will think so?" said Lisa, quickly and earnestly.

"Certainly."

"When he came here last week—Ah, I understand now. But why?—how was it?"

"It was announced in our county paper."

Lisa made an exclamation of incredulous horror. Mr. Lennard stood looking at her, and one of his old sweet smiles came suddenly into his face.

"We won't trouble ourselves about that any more," he said. "It can easily be contradicted. I have succeeded beyond my hopes. I have found a certain cure for Will, I think. Now we had better not lose any more time. By leaving this at six, we shall catch the half-past seven express, and shall reach Mallam before midnight. Will you tell your aunt?"

Poor Lady Anne was lying down peacefully in her own room. Even disappointment could not make her feel anything but contented and comfortable, with the soft rosy light from her pink blinds, the scent of April

flowers, and the delicious song of a thrush on a lilac bush just under the window. Into this spring paradise came Lisa with her strong new feelings, with quite a new agitation in her manner, which disturbed her aunt effectually.

She listened to the story in consternation, and at first declared it impossible that Lisa could go.

"With a strange man—nobody knows where—my dear child, you are mad," said Lady Anne, feeling as if she had waked up among the whirling mysteries of a sensation novel.

"But I must go—Will's life depends upon it. You don't understand. Mr. Lennard is not strange at all—very nice. You must come and see him for yourself."

"Very well: ring for Rachel. It is impossible, Lisa. I am responsible for you. I am sorry for poor Mr. Thorpe, but really I thought we had done with him. As for that newspaper report, I never heard anything so extraordinary—though now I come to think of it, I believe Spenser knew of it on Sunday, poor fellow. My dear child, do consider how you will commit yourself, if you do anything so rash and unheard-of."

"I have considered. I am tired of considering. I want to do something rash. I shall certainly do this, unless you absolutely forbid it."

"Lisa, my child, let me understand you. You care for this Will, then, more than for me, or any one?"

Lady Anne laid her hand on Lisa's shoulder, and looked her earnestly in the face. Lisa coloured deeply as she met her eyes, but answered after a moment, gently and steadily.

"You are making me confess what I have hardly even told myself. Yes: I do care for Will more than for anyone else. So now you will let me go to him."

"I must know something more about the circumstances," said Lady Anne, sighing; "I wish I could spare Rachel to go with you, instead of Mary. I wonder if I could."

"No: I could not bear to think of you without Rachel. I shall be quite safe; there are plenty of people down there, and it is Mary's native place, you know. Come and see the uncle."

"And he really is not very disagreeable?"

"Peculiar, but rather charming. And so good-looking. Ah—Miss Kenneth—I forgot he was the hero of that story."

Being once obliged to give in, Lady Anne did her part quite gracefully. She ordered a hurried dinner for the travellers, and showed Mr. Lennard a friendly cordiality which surprised him. But no one would have guessed from his appearance or manners that the Squire of Mallam had been a hermit for all these years. He smiled as he saw Lady Anne's eyes following Lisa as she moved about the room, and said presently, in his odd, low, careless voice—

"It is very good of you to trust your niece to me. I don't mean to keep her in my charge, however. My house is not fit for a lady."

"Then where is she going? I really must know," said Lady Anne.

"There are one or two houses. My agent would feel himself honoured—but I shall not decide that point myself. I shall introduce Miss Dalbiac to a lady who has kindly taken charge of Will. There are a

good many people devoted to him. I heard this morning that they had telegraphed to his uncle Thorpe, at Oxford."

"And may one ask who this lady is?" said Lady Anne.

"A Miss Kenneth, sister to a neighbour of mine. But you know her I think."

"Oh, certainly. One of the best and kindest people in the world," said Lady Anne hastily.

Lisa blushed, with a vivid recollection of Miss Kenneth's niece, and what she had said to her in the autumn. But that was not worth thinking of now. Nothing could be more interesting than the present—a night journey with Will's remarkable uncle, who seemed to have forgiven him thoroughly—and then the arrival—she thought of that with a sort of dread, and yet with a longing all the stronger for being so late discovered.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JULIA'S ANSWER.

"O fare-ye-well, young man," she says,
"Farewell, and I bid adieu;
If you can fancy me," she says,
"I cannot fancy you."

VERY sad and anxious was everybody at Mallam, all through that Monday. Mr. Thorpe arrived in the afternoon, and would hardly stir from his nephew's room, where he and Esther made friends at once. She and the doctor tried to speak cheerfully to Will's many friends, but they began to feel rather hopeless when the fever showed no sign of abating, and their patient seemed to have very little strength to resist it. The doctor said he must really have been ill several days; he must have had a shock, or some great distress of mind; the adventure at the fire was only the finishing stroke.

That afternoon Julia Kenneth walked across the fields from Selbridge, and her aunt came out of the sick-room to talk to her, leaving Mr. Thorpe there, who had lately arrived. Esther came out to the door, where birds were singing, and flying about their nests in the elm-trees, and two or three of Julia's dogs had stretched themselves to rest in the shade. Esther looked up at the sky, at the white clouds slowly following each other across the blue. She was very pale and worn, and

there was a mixture of feelings in Julia's face as she watched her.

"No better, aunt Esther? Still crying out for her? Listen, and I'll tell you something I did the other day, just to satisfy my own curiosity," said Julia, half under her breath.

"Yes; what was it?" said Esther.

"I sent a copy of that paper—you know—to Lord Fareham himself. I marked it—if he opened the paper at all, he could not help seeing it. And if it is not true, there will be a contradiction."

"But, my dear, we have every reason for believing that it is true. However, it can't do any harm," said Esther, and she sighed.

"Papa was engaged this afternoon; he will be here this evening," said Julia.

She was strangely softened, and she stood looking at her aunt with eyes in which there was a great deal of very affectionate admiration. Somehow in the last few months Esther had completely made her way to this wild girl's heart.

As Julia went home through the fields, she was overtaken by Alfred Perrott, who walked along by her side. She thought him a bore, but she could not get rid of him, and the cordial way in which he asked for the last news of Will disarmed her a little. She gave a melancholy account, and Alfred said he was very sorry to hear it.

"Ah! everybody is sorry now," said Julia. "You heard of Mr. Lennard's coming to see him yesterday?"

"Yes. The weather in that quarter is very changeable," said Alfred, smiling.

"He felt how badly he had treated him, I suppose,

I wonder what he is thinking of to-day in his hermitage. I advise you not to make too sure that they will not be as good friends as ever," said Julia.

Then she felt a little ashamed of having spoken her thoughts so openly. But Alfred did not seem to mind much.

"I should be sorry to be obliged to envy any one his good fortune," he said, "and especially a pleasant fellow like Thorpe. And I am very sorry that you should think me capable of it, Miss Kenneth."

"Oh—well, I did not exactly mean that," said Julia, colouring slightly, with a flourish of her whip. "Of course it is an awkward state of things. You can't help wishing that Mr. Matthew Lennard may be the winner. Only Charlotte showed her feelings to me rather plainly, and I suppose I gave you all credit for the same."

"Girls are so stupid—some girls, I mean," said Alfred. "Charlotte always throws herself headlong into things, and loves or hates like a fury. I saw she had annoyed you the other day, and told her she ought to be ashamed of herself."

"Oh—poor Lotty—I am sorry you did that. I had forgotten all about it," said Julia.

"I was extremely vexed," said Alfred, looking on the ground, and speaking rather quickly. "I should have been sorry if Lotty had spoken so to any one—but to you, whose good opinion is everything to me! I have had the happiness of knowing you for several years now, and time only strengthens my—might I say affection—for a young lady so admirable in every way. Perhaps I am presumptuous in speaking at all—but—

but—it is the devotion of a true heart that I venture to offer you, dear Miss Kenneth."

"What!" said Julia. There was an intonation in her voice which made her oldest and favourite dog stop short, turn round, walk up to Alfred, and sniff at him suspiciously.

"Down, old fellow," said Alfred, who had talked himself into a state of crimson nervousness, to which this one word from his companion was like a dash of cold water.

Julia had at first been almost bewildered, and had not found presence of mind to stop him in his course. Now he was beginning again—"I am sure you must understand me"—but she checked him with a movement of her hand.

"Let me speak, please," she said. "I don't know how I have brought this on myself—for it is my own fault, I suppose. Have you imagined that I gave you any encouragement to say all this?"

"No—but really—listen."

"I do not wish to listen. Don't say any more, please. We will both forget all about it. Which way are you going—to Selbridge, or Mallam?"

They were standing still in the path, and Alfred felt extremely foolish under the decided expression of anger, surprise, and contempt which shone in Julia's eyes. There could be no appeal from such eyes and such a manner as hers. The only thing was to get out of her way as soon as possible.

So he made her a low bow, and turned back towards Mallam, walking with as much dignity as he could muster at the moment.

Julia's reflections were very much disturbed.

"I know what aunt Esther would say," she thought. "My free and easy manner, of course. But a man like that—who would have imagined it! Good gracious! would not papa be in a jolly rage!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

AT THE INN.

"What would we give to our beloved?
The hero's heart to be unmoved,
The poet's star-tuned harp to sweep,
The patriot's voice to teach and rouse,
The monarch's crown to light the brows?—
He giveth His beloved, sleep."

E. B. BROWNING.

NOTHING in Lisa Dalbiac's life had ever been so dream-like as this—finding herself on the platform of a little roadside station at eleven o'clock at night, standing there alone, as it seemed, in a strange place, under a great dark sky full of stars.

The train had gone away into a cutting, and was hardly to be heard; a few yards off the station lights glimmered dimly, and Mr. Lennard was saying a few hurried words to the station-master, who was almost too sleepy to understand him. Farther down the platform, Mary Kean was keeping guard over the luggage, and chatting under her breath with the only porter. She at least felt herself welcome and at home. But Lisa was alone. She stood there, wrapped in her plaid shawl, and looked up at the stars; then with a sudden impatience she walked towards Mr. Lennard. He turned round and came to meet her.

"I am very sorry," he said. "I must send to the village for a conveyance—I never thought of that. I

ought to have telegraphed. It is a very bad reception for you."

He frowned and looked vexed, speaking impatiently at first, but in the last words his voice softened into the sweetness that was a constant surprise to Lisa.

"If you will come in and sit down," he said, "the porter shall go at once. It was my own fault. I cannot blame any one else. This comes of living in the wilds."

"But is it far to the village?" said Lisa.

"Not a mile. You will not have to wait long."

"It is such a beautiful night. We might walk"—Lisa suggested rather doubtfully.

"Are you strong enough?"

"Oh yes, certainly. I should like it best."

And in a few minutes they were out on the road, Lisa and the Squire walking on in advance, and Kean following with the porter and the luggage.

"The landlady of the inn," said Mr. Lennard, "is your maid's sister. I have spoken to her, and she assures me that you will be made very comfortable there. I do not attempt to take you to my house. It is a good deal farther off, but of course that is not my reason. It is not a fit place for a lady."

"I am sure you are doing everything that is kind," said Lisa.

"I don't know," he said, coughing a little. "You will find yourself singular in that opinion. I am afraid we must slacken our pace up this hill. I am not quite so young as I was."

Lisa noticed that he breathed hard as they climbed the hill into the village, which was very dark and still, for Mallam was an early place. Only one house in

the street seemed to be open; it had lights in several windows, and a man was standing in the doorway. As they passed he came suddenly forward into the road, and joined Mary Kean, with an eager cry of surprise.

"It is the blacksmith," said Mr. Lennard, pausing and looking back. "Nash—what news of Mr. Thorpe to-night?"

Mary gave Joe a little push, and he came slowly towards the Squire, almost too much puzzled by the sight of him and his companion to be able to answer.

"Is he better?" said Mr. Lennard, sharply. "What are you doing at this time of night?"

"No, sir, he's no better. Mr. Matthew's up there with him, and I was just going up to see. His head's that awful, they can't keep him still a minute. Mother was there this evening and she says she don't see how he can last much longer, if it goes on like this another day. It's the pain in his head—I don't rightly understand, myself."

Mr. Lennard turned away, and with a sudden movement made Lisa take his arm. He felt her trembling as they walked on towards the inn.

"You can't go there, can you?" he began to say, rather indistinctly. "Let me take you to Perrott's—my agent—they are good-natured people——"

"No, please," said Lisa, pressing his arm slightly. "I cannot go anywhere else."

They arrived at the door of the inn. It was very dark there under the trees. Mr. Lennard beckoned Mary forward.

"Knock at the door; tell your sister," he said. "Mind that Miss Dalbiac has something to eat before

she goes to bed. Good night"—turning to Lisa,—"and thank you."

"I shall see you to-morrow," said Lisa, putting her hand into his. He held it very tight for a moment.

"No. I don't think you will. Some day, perhaps. Take care of yourself."

Mrs. Lucas opened the door, throwing the light of her candle upon the group outside, the sight of which might well astonish her at such an hour. Her sister Mary, the Squire, a tall, pale young lady with beautiful eyes, Joe Nash and the porter in the background.

"Goodness heart alive!" she gasped under her breath.

Mr. Lennard stepped back at once out of the light. There were a few hasty words of explanation from Mary, and Mrs. Lucas, with her eyes full of tears, laid hands gently on Lisa and drew her into the passage.

"Bless you, my dear Miss," she said; "an angel from heaven couldn't be welcomer."

Then the door of the oak parlour opened slowly, and Matthew and Esther came forward together, talking in low tones. They had left Mr. Thorpe with Will, and had closed the door between the two rooms. Esther paused and stood still in utter astonishment, and Matthew opened wondering eyes, not at first guessing who the stranger must be.

"*You* here!" said Esther, taking both Lisa's hands, and looking into her anxious eyes.

Matthew looked round, saw Mary Kean, understood, and perceiving that no one had any time or notice to spare for him, went out of the house without saying good night. Joe, who was at the door,

walked home with him, so that he heard what surprised him much more than Miss Dalbiac's sudden appearance.

Mrs. Lucas flew at once to make preparations for her guest, and Lisa followed Esther into the parlour. Now that she was really at Mallam, close to Will's sick-room, a strange shyness came over her, and she found it quite impossible to explain her coming or to do anything but ask how he was.

"Just now he is a little quieter," said Esther. "I am very much surprised, do you know, to see you. Lady Anne's letting you come is the least part of my wonder. But I am very, very glad."

"Are you glad? Thank you," said Lisa, gently. "I came because Mr. Lennard thought he wanted me. Oh, did you see that, too, in the newspaper? It is not true."

"I see it is not. But what do you mean? Mr. Lennard——"

"He came to St. George's to-day to fetch me."

Lisa wondered for a moment what made Miss Kenneth's eyes suddenly so sweet. Then she remembered, but it was like memory in a dream. She has never since been able to believe that she really lived through that evening.

"Take your hat and shawl off," said Esther, "and come in for a moment. He is quiet from exhaustion, but not the least sensible. He will not know you."

Lisa looked almost as ill as the patient himself, when she followed his nurse into the room. There lay her poor friend Will, flushed and wasted, moaning now and then, and gazing at her with wild vacant eyes. Uncle Russell, very thin and anxious, sat crouched in

an armchair, and could not at first make out, in the dim light, who had come in with Miss Kenneth. Then he started violently, but Esther made him a sign, and he remained still, only muttering to himself, "Impossible! it would be spiritualism—magnetism. Of course somebody wrote to her."

One of Will's hands was lying outside the counterpane. The fingers spread themselves out, and clenched themselves together. Lisa, standing by the bed, suddenly laid her hand upon his, and the feverish fingers closed upon it and held it quite gently.

"Lisa!" he said; "everybody can't win in this life. Lord Chancellor—it's a lost battle after all. Lisa, Lisa!—never again—you may well laugh—failed—failed in life—Antigone."

His voice died away into low murmurs. Lisa looked round at Esther with a world of sad questioning in her eyes. But she said nothing till they were back in the parlour again; the poor fingers had been easily unclasped, and she had slowly withdrawn her hand. She sat down by the table in the parlour, and hid her face in her hands. Esther stood by, and gently touched her hair. Then Lisa lifted up her face.

"Is it always like this?" she said. "Oh, it is all my fault. I told him he must get on, and fight, and make himself worthy—oh you can't imagine what a fool I was—worthy of me, I thought—he—so good, so generous. And now, perhaps, I shall never be able to tell him—do you think so?"

"He is very ill. I know nothing," said Esther, gravely. "If he could have one thing, I should begin to hope."

"What is it?"

"Sleep."

"Ah! we can't give him that."

"No, it is not one of our gifts," said Esther, and with her eyes full of tears she stooped over and kissed Lisa on the forehead.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MALLAM PARK.

"Soe feeble is the thred that doth the burden stay,
Of my poor life in heavy plight that falleth in decay,
That but it have elsewhere some ayde or some succours,
The running spindle of my fate anon shall end his course."
SIR THOMAS WYAT.

LISA did not by any means bring the immediate cure to Will that his uncle had expected. He went on calling for her, talking about her, without any consciousness, in his feverish wanderings, that the face he loved so much and had longed for so often was bending over him. Still Esther was sure, and Mr. Thorpe was inclined to agree with her, that the fever was less violent after Lisa came. She was allowed to be in the room very little, and sometimes in the next day or two she felt herself rather useless, but when she said so to Esther, the smile and the quiet answer seemed enough for her.

"When he is conscious again, I mean to rest myself."

But on Wednesday afternoon there was a real change for the better. He was far less feverish, and even dropped off to sleep for a few minutes at a time. Lisa went out to the door to tell the good news to Julia Kenneth, who had stopped there in her pony carriage.

It can be easily understood that the inn had quite changed its character for the time. It was always quiet

and orderly, thanks to Mrs. Lucas and her good sturdy husband, but now it seemed to belong entirely to the invalid, and friends and neighbours only came to ask for him. Sir Thomas Kenneth's promise that they should not suffer by it was satisfactory to Lucas, who, though excellent, was not quite so Quixotic and unmercenary as his wife.

Julia got out of the carriage when Miss Dalbiac appeared, and stood talking to her at the door. No one would have guessed that they had formerly disliked each other. Julia's frank welcome had at once swept away Lisa's unpleasant recollections.

"Now do let me drive you about for an hour," said Julia, that afternoon. "You look almost as shadowy as aunt Esther. It won't do. Your aunt will never trust you among us again."

A week before, Lisa would certainly have been surprised to find herself sitting beside Julia Kenneth, driving along the Mallam lanes behind her lively pony. But now the idea was natural and pleasant. Will was asleep; there was a secret feeling of intense happiness in her heart, which made her feel friendly towards all the world.

Julia was pleased at the ready acceptance of her offer, told her groom he could wait for her at the inn, and carried Lisa off in triumph.

She chose to take her round part of the Mallam estate, and pointed out the different houses and farms in her off-hand way, while Lisa listened and looked with an odd feeling of interest which she could hardly put into words. They came to a place where there was a scent of burnt wood hanging about in the air, and

then, a little farther on, passed slowly in front of the ruined and desolated houses of the Long Croft.

"Oh!" said Lisa, flushing a little,—"it was here."

"Yes, here," said Julia. "How wretched it all looks! Can't you imagine how sad this sight must be to any one who has seen the work going on all the winter, and has known how much heart was put into it, and has heard all the hopes and ideas, and studied all the plans. Yes, it is a sad sight to some people, I can tell you."

Lisa felt for the moment as if she could not speak.

"The people are gone back into their old dens, I believe," Julia went on. "Fortunately they had not been pulled down. Ah! there is Archer wandering about. Mr. Archer, come here. I want to speak to you."

She pulled up, and beckoned energetically with her whip. Archer came, with some hesitation in his manner, down the black, trampled, ash-strewn garden.

"Good morning, ma'am," he said. "How's Mr. Thorpe to-day?"

"He is better; he has had a little sleep," said Julia.

Archer raised his eyes with a sudden gladness, and looked from one young lady to the other. Miss Dalbiac and her strange arrival were well known by report. This was she, no doubt, thought Archer, and a very pretty young lady too, though she looked frail and delicate beside Miss Kenneth's brighter colouring.

"This was a sad end to all the trouble Mr. Thorpe took for you," said Lisa.

"Yes, ma'am. Accidents will happen."

"You are a fatalist, are you not?" said Julia rather

impatiently. "Accidents will happen, because people are careless. Children will have the fever, because they are not kept clean or properly fed. Men will strike, because they can never be contented. By the by, how is the little boy with the fever? Some people say that Mr. Thorpe caught it from him."

"He's getting better," said Archer. "I scarcely think Mr. Thorpe's illness need be laid at his door. From what I can hear, it's a different kind of thing. But you're hard upon us altogether, Miss Kenneth. Well, I'll tell you this, Mr. Perrott was down here last night, and I had a long talk with him, and we're going in again to-morrow at the same wages as before. So nobody need talk about the strike any longer."

"I am heartily glad of it," said Julia. "And you are satisfied with what you have done, I hope—lost Mallam a good landlord, and the whole countryside a good neighbour."

"I hope not, miss," said Archer, colouring. "Mr. Lennard's come round, as I hear"——

"Ah, but we have not heard of his making another will yet. However, it is no business of mine—only I hope you are sorry. Good-day."

On went the pony, and Archer stood rather dismally looking after them.

"That man is crushed, and I'm glad of it," said Julia to her companion. "Mr. Thorpe made me like him at one time. But lately I have heard things from the Perrotts, and from Matthew Lennard, which showed me what a shallow, ungrateful creature it was. I am quite convinced," she went on, looking brightly round, "in spite of what I said to him, that Mr. Lennard will

lose no time in making his will again. He cannot let Mr. Thorpe be disappointed now."

"He seemed very anxious about him on Monday," said Lisa. "But I wonder we have seen nothing of him since."

"Why, aunt Esther keeps him away. He would rather face a roaring lion."

Lisa smiled.

"He made a terrible mistake once," she said.

"Ah, people don't like to remember their mistakes."

Lisa asked one or two questions about the Squire, and Julia told her all she knew.

They went driving on through winding and wandering lanes, sweet with the smell of spring, past blossoming orchards, past meadows golden with daffodils. Lisa's eyes rested pleasantly on soft blue distances, were carried along vistas of rugged trees in their yellow mist-like veil of young leaves. She pleased Julia by exclaiming on the beauty of the country. Presently they came upon old park palings, tall and jagged and mossy, behind which twisted clumps of old thorn-trees, and great elms standing in undisturbed stateliness, seemed like the guards and out-posts of some enchanted castle, hidden far away in the midst of them.

"Mallam House itself," said Julia, when Lisa made some remark of this kind. "The trees have been dreadfully neglected; half of them ought to be cut down. It really stands in the middle of a wood. A little farther on there is a gate, and that is the only place where you can get a glimpse of the house. A chimney or

two, and a brown, funny old corner turret. Mr. Thorpe told me once it belonged to his room."

When they came to the gate Julia stopped, and Lisa followed her advice by getting out, opening it, and walking a few yards along the grass-grown road, so as to see the corner of the house a little more clearly. The trees drew together almost immediately, and arched over the road. As she looked round, there was a quick bark among the fern, and something came running towards her, springing through the brushwood. It was a black dog, which jumped up joyfully, with short, sharp barks, and every sign of delight. Then, a little distance off, somebody spoke, so low and faintly that she could not catch the words. Julia, waiting at the gate, was surprised to see Miss Dalbiac turning off the road, and pushing her way through the fern-stalks under the trees.

Just beyond there was an open space, and here a man was sitting on the ground with his back against a tree. Lisa saw with horror and surprise that it was Mr. Lennard. He was very pale, but he smiled when he saw her, and made a sign with his hand.

"It is a scene in 'As you like it,'" he said, under his breath. "What brings you here, Rosalind?"

"Are you ill?" she said, stooping over him.

"Yes, rather. I had some kind of fainting fit an hour or two ago, and could not walk steadily after it. I waited for somebody to pass, but you—Did I hear wheels?"

"Miss Julia Kenneth was driving me. I thought I was wrong in trespassing, but now I am very glad. May I help you? or shall I call somebody?"

"Thank you—your hand——"

He tried to get up, but sank down again, turning so white that Lisa was really frightened.

"This is nonsense. I must get up. I have often had this pain before, but never——"

"Keep yourself still a moment, till I come back," said Lisa.

"Stay—you will come back? you are not going to leave me here, as a punishment——"

"I am going to call Miss Kenneth," said Lisa gently. "You must let her drive you home."

"She won't do it. Besides, I have nothing to say to any of them."

"Don't you think it is quite time all that was at an end?"

"Some things cannot end. How is Will? Does he know you?"

"Better. I left him asleep. No, he has not recognised me yet."

"What a block of wood!" said Mr. Lennard.

Lisa hurried back to the gate, where Julia was beginning to be alarmed at her absence. She was thoroughly startled by seeing her pale friend reappear with crimson cheeks, and still more by hearing what she had to say.

"If only I had brought Nixon with me!" she said. "I can't leave the pony for an instant."

She turned in at the gate, and Lisa went back to Mr. Lennard. She found him standing up, leaning against the tree, his dog watching him with anxious eyes.

"I am very grateful to you, Miss Dalbiac," he said. "If you will give me your arm, I will get as far as the carriage."

Lisa supported him as best she could. It was necessary to go a little round to avoid the brushwood, and by the time the few yards were accomplished he was almost fainting again. Julia looked at him with the greatest curiosity and interest, and stretched out her hand to help him in.

"I am sorry to interrupt your drive," he said to her, gravely and politely, as they went on at a foot's pace towards the house. "Where is Rosalind?—I mean Miss Lisa Dalbiac—ah, behind! I am shocked at having taken her place. You have a beautiful pony."

"A famous little fellow, isn't he," said Julia, "and as gentle as a lamb. You see how he is behaving now, but I assure you that when I am in a hurry he can go like an American trotter."

"This sort of thing must be as tiresome to him as to his mistress."

"Not at all. We are both glad to be neighbourly."

"You are literally the good Samaritan."

Julia looked round with a smile, but he was so pale, and his face seemed so drawn with pain, that she thought it best to say no more.

It was not long before they reached the house. The door was standing open, but no one was to be seen, and even on that bright April day there was an oppressive stillness.

Lisa's ring presently brought old Jacob, staring in astonishment. He weakly tried to help his master out, but Mr. Lennard seemed to trust much more to Lisa's slight, steady hand and arm. She supported him into the hall, and he sat down there, looking oddly up into her face. Jacob and the dog stood looking on.

"Have you no one to attend to you? May we send for the doctor?" suggested Lisa, filled with an intense pity, and almost affection, for this strange lonely man.

"No, I want nobody. They all hate me, and I hate them. Above all things, don't tell Perrott."

"But you will get better?"

"Who knows! Listen; you won't understand, and that old man is deaf. I only want one person, who certainly would not come. There, good-bye. Tell Will he is a lucky fellow."

Lisa left him unwillingly, and rejoined Julia Kenneth, who drove as fast as possible back to the inn.

CHAPTER XXIX.

QUEEN ESTHER.

"She pauses ere her heart can speak,
And, from below the source of tears,
The girlhood to her faded cheek
Goes slowly up through twenty years,
And, like the shadow in her eyes,
Slowly the living past replies."

SYDNEY DOBELL.

AN hour or two later, Mr. Lennard was sitting in his arm-chair by the library fire, free from pain, but languid and exhausted, angry with himself for his impatience of the suffering that he had long known must come, and with quite a new feeling of restless loneliness. That journey to London on Monday was the second that he had taken in the last few years. The former one was to consult a doctor, who had told him that he had heart disease, but with great care might live to be an old man. He was carefully to avoid all excitement and exertion, and certainly his hermit existence had not much of either.

That evening his thoughts wandered back five and twenty years, to a time when such a life as this would have seemed so unlikely as to be impossible. Troubles, of course, every one must expect—but to live alone at Mallam all the rest of his days—only the death of one person could have condemned him to that. And she was alive—yes, and he had seen her—and there was no reason to think that she felt the slightest shadow

of that regret which these last days had wakened for him from its long sleep, to sting more sharply than ever. She could devote herself to nursing Will, that poor stupid boyish nephew of his, to whom he now thought he had been unjust—but as for himself, why, he might die, and she would only say like other people —"So he is gone! Well, he was very odd, poor man."

The sun was low, and there was a gold glow among the trees, which reflected itself in the library; but in a few minutes all would be twilight. Somebody opened the door very gently, came in, and closed it again. Mr. Lennard was too tired to turn his head.

"John," said a low voice, that seemed to call across a waste of years, "was it me that you wanted?"

He got up instantly, and stood facing her.

"Is it you, Esther? I was just making up my mind that I believed in nothing."

"Don't tell me that, but sit down. What is the matter with you?"

He drew up a chair for her, and did not speak again till she was sitting near him. Even then it seemed as if he could do nothing but look at her, with a smile that brought the colour to her face, and made her feel strangely happy and young.

"Is it you, or a dream? One's dreams are the consequence of one's thoughts, are they not? Only stay a little longer, vision, if you are one. Don't be like everything else in this desolate world, vanishing as soon as one draws near."

"Why do you talk to me in that way?" said Esther, with a little tremulous pain in her voice. "Let us be in earnest, please. You are ill, are you not? Is it something new?"

"No, very old. It will kill me by and by, but not yet, I hope. Even you can't cure it. All wrong here," laying his hand on his heart, and smiling. "I am glad of it, as it has brought you."

"But you ought to see a doctor. Mr. Philipps will be at Mallam this evening—let me send him."

"No, I have done with all that. I saw a man in London—there is no more to be said. Esther—so you still feel a little interest in your old friend. But I saw what you thought of me on Sunday. I am a hopeless character—cruel, selfish, unjust, as cold as a stone. What could you expect of a man who has lived alone for five-and-twenty years?"

"His character need not have been spoilt, I think. He might still know right from wrong. But let me thank you, as poor Will cannot, for fetching the very person he wanted most."

"I hoped you would be pleased."

"Was that why you did it?"

"Yes. What is it that interests you so much in that fellow Will? By the by, is he going to live?"

"I hope so," said Esther. She talked a little about Will, while he leaned his head back and listened, without taking his eyes from her face.

"Poor Will!" he said, more gravely. "I ought never to have had him here."

"On the contrary, I think you were quite right in that. There was no real reason for estranging yourself from Theresa all her life, and the least you could do was to be a friend to her son—but not by making promises and breaking them."

"Esther—you always told me what you thought of me. Why did you give me up?"

"Was it my doing?" she said, with sudden tears in her eyes.

"No, I know. What a wretched life I have had! One must believe in eternity, if it is only as a compensation for time. Read this. Will found it in a prayer-book of his mother's."

"But our time is only a few years in the middle of eternity," said Esther, taking the paper from him.

She could hardly see to read her old friend's faint characters, or trust herself to think what might perhaps have been, if John Lennard had seen this when it was first written. "If she really loves you, this can make no difference to her." Esther thought that Theresa might have known her well enough to speak more strongly, and to dispense with the "if" altogether.

She said nothing, only folded the paper again, and gave it back to him.

"Was she right, Esther?" he said, and she bowed her head in answer.

"Well, listen to me," he went on after a minute. "I want to be very clear and business-like. Will must have Mallam, of course, if it is only for the sake of that charming girl he is to marry. But what do you think of my leaving Matthew something—five hundred a year—not from any liking for him, but to quiet old Perrott's mind a little."

"I think you would be quite right," said Esther; "and Clementina Perrott deserves to be happy."

"Happiness with Matthew—can you imagine it? You smile, my charitable saint, but you must think him a terribly dry stick. I can tell you one good thing of him, however. He and the girl came here

one day, a week or two ago. She stepped in at that window—you are not my first lady visitor, you see—and begged me not to alter my will. It was already burnt, however; but one does not forget such touches of generosity in this sordid world. Nothing extraordinary, perhaps, in a sentimental girl; but it says something for Matthew that he let her do it."

"It does. I am very glad to hear of it," said Esther.

They sat quite silent for a minute or two, he with a restful expression on his face that was quite strange to it. The glow outside had died away, and Esther began to think that she ought to go, but when she moved, he took her hand between both his and held it.

"Patience: after all these years, cannot you spare me half-an-hour? I want more than that. Esther, sit down again. I have more to say to you."

She sat down, and waited a minute or two before he went on.

"I have been lonely long enough. I want to be happy for the rest of my life. Why should not this house be as bright as other houses, with music, and cheerful voices, and people going in and out. Will's wife can sing, I am sure. You used to sing."

"Yes, but I never do now. Will's wife, as you call her—poor fellow, he would be surprised—she sings and plays charmingly. What you say makes me very happy. You must carry it out."

"What, alone!" and as she blushed like a girl, and made a little startled movement,—"Am I selfish? I am only fifty-seven, and the doctor said I might live to be old. I know you have a great deal to forgive,

my dear; but some people can forgive, and can sacrifice themselves, and they should not be surprised at being asked to do so. It has been a long engagement, Esther—will you fulfil it at last?"

She bent her head down, trying to collect her thoughts, and to know what she ought to say—whether she might give way to the strong attraction that still drew her to this man, with all his faults that she felt so keenly, his strange opinions, his carelessness and neglect of everything she held sacred. Could she leave the children, too, who loved her and depended on her?

But she remembered the promise she had made to him in old days, and certainly never withdrawn; and another solemn promise made to herself after her great sorrow came, that, as far as she was concerned, no other strong human love should come between her and him, so that perhaps in some happy hereafter they might find each other again. And now was she to refuse this wish of his, that they might be together for the short remainder of their lives, knowing, as she did, how strong was her influence over him, and feeling that if she let go his hand now, he might drift away into still wilder and colder seas of faithless darkness? If Esther had loved him a little less than she did, she would have been quite sure that her duty was to stay with him,—but she was half afraid to give way to what was so certainly her happiness as well as his. She was feeling very sad and doubtful, when a few words from him decided her.

"Ah, I feared I was asking an impossible thing. You don't care for me any longer—how should you!"

"But I do," said Esther, looking up suddenly. "Yes

—if you really want me—I was only afraid of being too happy."

He got up, stooped over her and kissed her, without saying anything.

"What will Tom say?" he asked, after a minute's silence.

"Dear Tom! He will be very happy too."

"I shall have to ask his consent formally, I suppose. Would he come and see me to-morrow?"

"Yes; he shall come to-morrow morning," said Esther, smiling.

Then she got up and tried again to go, but he would not part with her so soon.

"No, no," he said, "let us have it quite to ourselves a little longer. I must tell you something of what you are undertaking. You are a brave, wise woman, and I shall put everything into your hands."

"What, to do your work? Indeed I will never consent to that."

"One thing I have quite decided on. I shall leave everything to you, to do what you please with it, divide it as you think best. That was what I originally intended, to make you joint sovereign. Mallam's lucky days are beginning at last. Queen Esther—you will rule with justice and mercy."

Esther herself felt as if all this did not matter much now. She was too much occupied with himself to think about his affairs. They drifted by degrees into graver talk; in her presence, now, it seemed as if he could not be careless or cynical, and one might even have fancied that she gave him something of her vivid consciousness of things unseen. At last, when it was really dusk, he walked with her to the

gate into the park, and asked her if she could find her way.

"Your forest has grown very thick and old since I knew it well," said Esther, "but I have not forgotten my bearings."

"No—you get them from the sky. Ten o'clock in the morning, then, if you can leave your patient—and if Tom does not find the shock too great for him. Good-night, my dear. I wish I could walk home with you."

"We must not behave as if we were twenty," said Esther, smiling. "Good-night."

She left him, and he lost sight of her directly among the shadows. But he lingered there for some minutes, leaning on the gate, listening, as if he could still hear her footfall on the pathway, and the light rustle of her gown against the grass. Then at last he walked slowly back to his empty house. Music, and cheerful voices, and people going in and out—would they ever be possible there?

CHAPTER XXX.

UNDER SUNBEAMS.

"God pity them both! and pity us all,
Who vainly the dreams of youth recall.
For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: 'It might have been!
Ah, well! for us all some sweet hope lies
Deeply buried from human eyes;
And, in the hereafter, angels may
Roll the stone from its grave away!"

J. G. WHITTIER.

SIR THOMAS KENNETH and his sister did not talk much as they came through the park that spring morning, but it was a long time since either of them had felt quite so happy. Sir Thomas was trying all the time to persuade himself to be angry: here was Esther going to sacrifice herself to the queerest fellow in the world, giving herself up to his whims and tempers for the rest of his life; and no one knew better than he did how loyally and entirely the sacrifice would be made; and John Lennard, absurd fellow, certainly did not deserve all this. Sir Thomas had grumbled a good deal to Esther herself, till he saw tears in her eyes, and then he began to contradict himself flatly, and averred that this was the only thing he wanted to make him really comfortable and happy at Selbridge, and that the advantage to Julia of having her aunt so near would be something enormous.

As they walked through the park, he made a few remarks on the shocking state of the timber, trees

tumbling to pieces from sheer neglect, and so on, but he became silent when they approached the house. Waiting in the porch, Esther looked at him and saw that his face was rather pale and contracted.

"I was just thinking of the last time I was here," he said to her.

"Yes, I remember," said Esther gently.

That summer evening, when they two had ridden down together from Selbridge, when he, though a much duller man in those days, had been struck by the strange, painful excitement of the girl who was to have been his wife the next morning—well, it was better not to remember those things. Theresa had pleased herself, and no doubt it was better for them both in the end. John Lennard's behaviour had been the worst part of it, after all, and now that was forgotten too.

Old Jacob came hobbling and staring to the door, said Mr. Lennard was not down yet, and led the way to the library, where his master's breakfast was laid in front of the fire. He went away, but came back again in a minute or two, and put in his head with a puzzled countenance.

"Don't believe he's awake, sir. He always rings, and his bell ain't been touched this morning, that's certain. Not that I always hears it myself, being as I'm hard of hearing, but that's what my wife says, and she and Jem's listened at the door and not heard him stirring. He can't abide our knocking of him up; we always waits till he rings."

"Very well," said Sir Thomas, loudly and decidedly, "but your master made an appointment with me, and I can't wait here all day. So go and knock at his

door for once, my good fellow, and tell him I sent you."

Away went Jacob. Sir Thomas walked to the window and stood there looking out. Esther sat down, pressing her hands together, and wondering why she felt so cold and so nervous. There was nothing strange in the irregular habits of a solitary man like this. She told herself, over and over again, that she had no right to be surprised: he was no doubt tired out by the pain and the excitement of yesterday; it was better for him to sleep on, and be rested thoroughly. This feeling of hers was very foolish; it was like a cold hand pressing on her heart. She got up, startled, for old Jacob had again appeared at the door.

"Please ma'am," he said, addressing her, "I knocked and knocked, and there wasn't no answer, so I made bold to open the door a bit and look in. The Squire's never undressed: there he is lying fast asleep on the sofa betwixt the fireplace and the window. So sound, please, sir, that I daren't wake him. I'm an old man, and I can't afford to lose my place. The Squire won't have any of us disturb him. The blind's up, and the sun's shining in, full on his face; it's a wonder that hasn't woke him."

"I will go up myself," said Sir Thomas, coming forward. "Esther, you had better stay here."

"No; I can't do that," she said, and they both followed old Jacob, who went on muttering to himself.

He opened the bedroom door, and lingered there, seeming afraid to face the Squire's waking, even in company with his friends.

The great wide room was full of sunlight; the broad old sofa, covered with dark red chintz, was pulled out

from the wall, and the only picture, the Romney lady, over the mantelpiece, looked sadly down upon it. Through the nearest window the sun shone on her, and on Mr. Lennard's profile as he lay upon the sofa, with his face turned towards her.

This was a deep sleep indeed. His clear delicate features shone like marble against their background of cushion and shadow, and his hair lay back from his forehead in soft waves, motionless. His lips were slightly parted, with a sweeter smile than they had ever worn in life;—for the Squire was dead.

They saw it instantly, these two who had come to greet his waking; he wanted them no more. A half sob from Sir Thomas was the only sound that broke the solemn stillness of the room. Esther took his hand and held it tight, and for a few minutes they stood looking silently at the wonderful beauty of the face.

Ennobled thus by death, it might have been the face of a saint or a martyr—but this man's outer life had been that of a selfish misanthropist. And yet Esther thought, as she looked at him, while her eyes were dimmed by fast-coming tears, that no one in this world really knew him but herself; and if she, knowing him, could love him so well too, it was almost a happiness to feel that no human judgment would affect him any more.

"Loved better!" said Esther to herself. "But oh, thank God for last night.—I thought it was this," she whispered to her brother.

"Yes, my dear; you would come," muttered Sir Thomas in answer. "Poor, dear old Jack!"

Jacob, with a dim perception of the truth, had stolen away to call his wife, and they were alone with

their friend. Esther stooped down and kissed him; she felt strangely that he belonged to her now, more than he ever had in life. Sir Thomas followed her example, and presently they both turned slowly away, to meet the frightened servants at the door.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ESTHER AND LISA.

"When I remember something promised me,
But which I never had, nor can have now,
Because the promiser we no more see
In countries that accord with mortal vow;
When I remember this, I mourn,—but yet,
My happier days are not the days when I forget."

JEAN INGELOW.

THE consequences of Mr. Lennard's death dawned on people's minds one after another. He could not be much mourned, except by the friends from whom he had been so long divided, and by Lisa Dalbiac, between whom and himself there had suddenly sprung up such a strong interest and liking.

As for his nephew Will, the news was, of course, carefully kept from reaching his ears. Perhaps the latter days of that week were the most painful and trying part of his illness, when he was just so much better as to feel himself miserably ill. The fever had left him, but he was so weak and so excitable that the slightest noise had to be guarded against more than ever. The doctor absolutely forbade Lisa to go near the room, for the shock of seeing her, or even of hearing her voice in the distance, would have thrown the patient back at once, and probably renewed the fever.

Esther and Russell Thorpe went quietly on with their nursing, and at Esther's wish, Lisa allowed herself to be carried off to Selbridge Court by Sir Thomas,

where she stayed a few days with Julia, and became the very best of friends with her former enemy.

But the Squire had one other little mourner, who cried her eyes out privately, and strange to say, escaped without reproach, and without being called unnatural. Mrs. Perrott and Lotty agreed together that of all the silly girls in the world, Tiny was marvellously and incomparably the silliest, but they themselves were too thankful and too much surprised at the providential turn of events to be angry with her. Besides, they felt that a person in Tiny's position had a right to cry if she pleased, even at her own good fortune. For Matthew's claim to all his uncle's real property was indisputable, and though the personal property had to be divided between him, his two sisters, and Will Thorpe, it was so small in comparison that Mrs. Perrott thought it not worth vexing one's self about. Matthew himself looked very grim, and responded with extreme coldness to any congratulations; in fact Mrs. Perrott was not far wrong when she said that two such unthankful young people her eyes had never beheld before.

The Squire's funeral was on Tuesday afternoon. Esther, yielding to her brother's earnest wish, left Will in Mr. Thorpe's and Mrs. Lucas's care, and spent that day with the two girls at Selbridge. She stayed in her own room a great part of the afternoon, but came down between four and five o'clock, and saw them from the drawing-room window walking on the lawn, talking together very earnestly.

She sat down and watched them, thinking of her own life and theirs, till presently they saw her there, and came towards the window.

There was a strong contrast between the two, Julia full of life and strength, Lisa rather sad, depressed, and drooping a little, like a long slender lily. Was she afraid, Esther wondered, at the prospect that lay before her of marrying a poor man after all? This time last week Will's succession to Mallam had been humanly certain, a decided thing, at least, in his uncle's mind—but what were a man's intentions in the face of death!

The girls came and sat down at Esther's feet, on the stone steps outside the open window. The afternoon was soft and lovely, the sun shone on them across a belt of tall trees opposite, some beds on the lawn were blue with forget-me-nots.

"It feels like Sunday," said Julia, pushing back her curls.

"I want to tell you both something," said Esther, bending forward, and looking from one to the other. "I asked your father not to tell you, Julia—and Lisa does not know. It is about Mr. Lennard—I want you to love and respect his memory."

Julia looked grave, and Lisa raised doubtful, earnest eyes to Miss Kenneth's face.

"Yes, Lisa—you may think he was unjust to Mr. Thorpe—but if you knew everything, you would forgive him. Such a painful life, tried by disease, latterly, more than any one knew, no one that he could really trust or care for, except Will—and then that sad quarrel with him, in which he afterwards knew that he was wrong. Now listen, for I want to tell you what he said to me that evening. You both know my old story."

"Yes, aunt Esther, we know," said Julia.

Then Esther told them, in as few words as she could, what he had wished for his future, what he had said about his property, about Will, and everything.

"So you see," she said, "when I went back that Thursday morning, I thought that very soon—at last—after all the years, I should have a great responsibility in my hands, and I felt almost afraid, but very happy, for we belonged entirely to each other, he and I; and I should never have feared to say anything to him, and because I trusted him so thoroughly, I should never have found myself mistaken—but it was not to be."

There was something dreamy and strange in her aunt's manner which almost frightened Julia; she seemed to be speaking to herself more than to them. Presently she went on, looking at Lisa, and speaking more directly to her.

"I might have been warned, I think, by his wishing for music and singing and a bright cheerful house; all that was such a sudden change in him. I have been obliged, year after year, to give up the hope of seeing him again, and now at last I have had my wish, and the difficulty is to be thankful enough for that. If you had seen him, you would understand the feeling that one ought not to be sorry. Your father asked me afterwards, Julia, if he always had such a beautiful face. The beauty was always in it, I thought, but it never showed itself so clearly before, and no wonder. But, Lisa, I am forgetting what I had to say to you. If he had lived, and if we had been married, as he wished, you and Will would have been our children. Forgive me, dear, I forgot it was not quite settled yet. You seem to belong to him, and he thought so too,

and spoke of you so—John, I mean—you must not mind my saying this."

Lisa looked up, smiling faintly, and put her hand into Miss Kenneth's, which was stretched out to her.

"I want to tell you," Esther went on, "what you can do to make up to me for the loss of him. Though things have turned out so differently, let me carry out his wishes as far as I can. I have spoken to my brother, and he is very glad—as for Julia, I know I need not ask her. Of course my children in London must be taken care of—but never mind particulars now—as far as I can, I mean to make your Will my heir."

Lisa's lips trembled, and she covered her face with her hands. Esther leaned forward and touched her hair.

"He will not see the justice of it at first, I daresay," she said, "but I depend on you to show him that it must be."

"Oh no—it is impossible," said Lisa in a low voice.

But Esther's hand remained on her head.

"You won't have me, then? You will make me lead the rest of my life without any near interest? I thought I had one at last."

Lisa could not say any more. Presently she felt a sudden and rather rough kiss on her forehead from Julia, who got up and walked off, leaving them together.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"WHEN THE BATTLE'S LOST AND WON."

"Guess now who holds thee?"—"Death," I said. But there
The silver answer rang,—"Not Death, but Love."
E. B. BROWNING.

ON the next Sunday afternoon the doctor allowed Will to move out of his room for the first time, to spend a few hours on the sofa in the parlour. Mr. Thorpe and Esther saw him established there, with a great arrangement of cushions and rugs. He smiled rather sadly as they stood and looked at him.

"I hope I shall not give you much more trouble," he said. "I don't know why you have been so good to me, but I suppose you're pleased with the result. Now I must get well as fast as I can."

"Yes, my boy. Don't look at those hands of yours, or think about them, more than you can help," said uncle Russell, hastily. "Now, if Miss Kenneth will excuse me, I'm going out for a walk."

He left the room at once, being ashamed of the tears in his eyes, and the unmanageable quiver in his voice. The change in Will was more distressing, now that he was up and dressed; the white, wasted, sunken features, the hollow eyes, transparent skin, and slow painful movements, were unusually sad to any one who had known him all through his healthy active youth.

Mr. Thorpe looked round at the door with a parting smile and nod to Esther, as much as to say, "There, now I leave you to do your part."

Esther sat by the window with a book in her hand, and for a few minutes Will lay quite still, with closed eyes. But presently, looking up, she saw that he was gazing at the picture, which glowed upon the dark oak panelling in strange contrast to the dim samplers of past Lucases.

"It is so odd," he said. "I seem to have forgotten everything, and it all comes back to me by degrees, one thing after another. Can you tell me exactly how long I have been ill?"

"A fortnight," said Esther.

"Not more than that! If you knew how long it seems! Then everything is just the same, and I thought all sorts of changes must have happened. Do you know anything about that strike at the quarries?"

"It is over. The men went to work again at their old wages, a day or two after the fire."

"I'm glad of that, poor fellows. But where are they living?"

"All the houses were not burnt, you know. Some of them are still there; some are gone back into the lane."

Will sighed. Esther was afraid to think what his next question might be. But some instinct kept him from mentioning his uncle's name. After a few minutes he spoke again.

"Only a fortnight! Then they are not married yet, I suppose. Have you heard anything of Miss Dalbiac?"

"Do you know," said Esther, without directly answering this question, "that we have all been mistaken about Miss Dalbiac. You remember showing me something in the paper about her engagement to Lord Fareham."

"Yes, of course!" said Will, starting up.

"Now remember that I am your nurse," said Esther, "and that I mean what I say. If you cannot control yourself, I shall not tell you any more. Lie down and be still."

"I shall be quiet enough, as soon as I know everything," said Will. "Do go on."

"She is not engaged to Lord Fareham. A contradiction appeared in the next paper."

For some time Will was silent. "Is it true?" he said at last.

"Quite true."

"Does she know about me? Ah, well, she wouldn't care."

"I think you do her injustice. She does know, and is very anxious about you."

"*I* do her injustice! Ah, you did not see her that day. But what a stupid fool she must have thought me—taking it for granted in that absurd way. But anyhow she will have nothing to say to me. My only chance was to succeed and get on in life—and you see what a mess I have made of it all. She said every one must fight his battle and win it. I have lost mine completely. She despises people like me. She says it is a man's own fault if he fails."

"But, my dear Will," said Esther, smiling, "do you think life's battle only lasts one year, and is won or lost

for ever at four-and-twenty! My experience is something very different."

"Ah, but you would judge a fellow by one year of his life."

"Certainly I should not."

"But she would—she does. Will you give me some paper, please. I want to write to her."

"Do you think you had better write now? You look tired already. Go to sleep for a little, and write presently."

"I can't go to sleep till I have written."

Esther smiled in answer to the imploring look in his eyes. She gave him her writing things, which were on the table, and went back to her seat in the window. Very slowly and with a trembling hand the characters were formed.

"Dear Lisa—I think I owe you a report of myself. I have failed so utterly, that I dare not hope——"

Then the hand let itself fall wearily on the paper. Will smiled at Esther as she rose and came to him.

"You were right," he said. "I must shut my eyes a little first. My head and my hands seem equally good-for-nothing."

His head fell back on the cushions, and he was asleep in a moment, with folded hands resting on the letter just begun.

Presently Esther went gently out of the room, and met Lisa in the passage.

"He is asleep," she whispered. "Go in and stay there till he wakes. God bless you, my dear girl."

Lisa looked up into Miss Kenneth's sweet earnest

eyes, with a feeling that she was almost selfish in her happiness. Esther saw the thought, and answered it with a silent embrace, and then Lisa, as if in a dream, went on alone into the parlour.

She stood for a few minutes looking at Will, with a shyness that she had only known in the last fortnight, and a nervous fear of his waking. He sighed, and she went a little nearer to him; her eyes fell on the few uneven lines of the letter to herself. Then she stood by him with her hands clasped, watching him as he slept on, while recollections, both sad and happy, came crowding into her mind.

Presently he sighed again, moved uneasily, and moaned out something in a low weary voice. An ear less quick and intent than Lisa's would hardly have caught the words, "I'd rather die!" The sudden pain they gave her was too sharp to be borne. She fell on her knees beside Will, laid her hand on his, and woke him, crying out, "No, no, Will, you must not die. I want you to live—dear Will!"

The blue eyes opened wide and stared at her; then he raised himself on his elbow, and looked into her face

"Did you say you wanted me to live? Lisa, do you care for me, then?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

OLD FRIENDS.

"Is life a plant? The King of years
To mine nor good nor ill can bring;—
Mine grows no more; no more it fears
Even the brushing of his wing:
With sheathèd scythe I see him go,—
I have no flowers that *he* can mow."

LORD HOUGHTON.

IT was September again, and Lisa was standing in one of the salon windows of a Paris hotel, looking out into the street. She had been reading some letters which she held in her hand, and now she was waiting, with happy contented eyes, for somebody who was to read them too. The only other person in the room was an old lady, holding Galignani before her, and peeping round now and then at the graceful figure in the window.

It was not long before Lisa turned round, and a moment afterwards Will came into the room. He was thinner than in old days, but looking sunburnt and well.

The old lady in the corner had taken occasion the day before to remark to an acquaintance that she had travelled a good deal, and had met with innumerable young married people, but that none had ever seemed to understand each other so perfectly as these.

They sat down on a sofa near the window, and she had the pleasure of hearing them talk.

"Well, have you seen him?" said Lisa.

"Yes—looking wonderfully well, and working harder than ever. He will be here very soon—quite wild to see you again. He says he has something to tell you."

"Did you ask about my poor Le Bretons?"

"He is going to bring you some news of them—good news, from his manner. Have you got some letters?"

"From aunt Anne. She is anxious to have us back, though Spenser is as amiable as ever, and goes to see her very often."

"Poor fellow!" said Will. "You ought to be sorry for him, but there always was something cold-hearted about you."

"I am sure he does not need pity. He has everything the world can give him. And I assure you he never was in despair. Ah! one knows very well," said Lisa, smiling.

"Well, I pity him, if you don't."

"Here is a letter from Clementina. They are to be married on the 20th. Mallam will distinguish itself for once; the preparations seem to be something extraordinary. And this will surprise you, Will. Mr. and Mrs. Perrott are going to leave Mallam in the spring; your cousin intends to manage everything himself. Clementina says her people are going to travel for a time—let us stay at home—and then settle in some watering-place. Her brother is going to America for three or four years."

"I'm very glad of all that, but not at all surprised," said Will. "I knew Mat did not mean to marry her relations. Mallam will be all the better for it, I dare-

say. Tiny is a good girl, and Mat is a much better fellow than you would think from his manner. Alfred will be a very good riddance, especially for Julia Kenneth. Did I ever tell you that there were some things in Mat very like uncle Lennard?"

Will lowered his voice slightly. He had never had a greater trouble than his uncle's death, that shadow on his new happiness, of which Lisa herself had told him on a Sunday evening in spring.

"Yes, I think you did," said Lisa, "but I don't quite understand it. Mr. Lennard never can have been so uninteresting at any time in his life. And there is one immense difference. Your uncle had plenty of pride, but no vanity. He never wanted the admiration of inferior people. He never could have cared for a woman who was inferior to him in any way. I think one may judge a man very fairly by the wife he chooses. Don't laugh, Will. You could never imagine Matthew in love with our Queen Esther. She would always have been as far above the level of his dreams as the moon herself."

Will looked at her, smiling, but had not time to say any more, for in at the salon door came Monsieur Simonet and a lady. Will and Lisa started up and went to meet them. The Frenchwoman held back a little, blushing and laughing, but Mr. Simonet advanced with a sweeping bow.

"Madame, allow me to present to you my wife."

"Ah! ma chère Vévette!" cried Lisa, seizing Madame Simonet's two eager little hands.

Will, looking very tall and English, stood in the window and listened to his wife's talk with her old friends, joining in now and then when he seemed to

be wanted. They had a very great deal to say about their own affairs, Mimi's improvement in health, Vévette's painting, M. Simonet's Joan of Arc, which had made such a sensation in that summer's Salon. Lisa had many old acquaintances to inquire for, and presently, she and Vévette having floated away on a flood of mutual artistic recollections, Monsieur Simonet came up to Will, and wrung his hand confidentially, with several emphatic nods.

"Sir, I congratulate you. Madame est charmante—charmante!"

"Et vous aussi," was Will's attempt at a suitable reply, with a glance at Vévette over her husband's shoulder.

M. Simonet bowed and smiled: he understood the meaning of the excellent Anglais, and was quite satisfied.

When I last heard of Will and Lisa, they were living in London, not far from their friend Miss Kenneth. Will had got an appointment under Government, something to do with charitable institutions, which gave him a great deal of writing and hard work.

Lisa too was not idle, and one of her pictures had already been seen at the Academy. It was founded on that old French song of the Three Princesses, which always had an attraction for her, and seemed to have influenced her life.

Her husband, of course, will never do anything very great in this world, but neither, I am sure, will he do anything small. His first attempt at philanthropy will not be his last, and he will be disappointed over

and over again. But I think none of his failures will trouble Lisa much, for she has made up her mind by this time that there is something better than success. And she has a conviction which has grown up slowly, and which a great man has put into words for her—that "the battle itself is victory."

THE END.

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